

the curious tale of a not so lost runaway prince

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the curious tale of a not so lost runaway prince

by [xMultiFandomsx](#)

Summary

Tommy is the youngest prince of the Antarctic Empire who's fed up with being ignored by his family so he takes matters into his own hands. He begins to sneak out from the palace into the city nearby in hopes to catch someone's attention. It's there he begins to form a new sort of family. He experiences life like never before: discovering friendship, running from criminals, and (most importantly) eating wonderful foods.

-or-

Prince Tommy was sick of his family forgetting about him and tries to get their attention which ends up leading him right into the arms of a whole new one. Will Tommy's royal life get in the way of his new city life? Will the royal family finally notice their youngest prince? There's only one way to find out.

Notes

i got bored so i'm writing this, it's based on the characters not the cc's, there are also no romantic relationships planned. i can't promise I'll finish this but it's been really fun to write so I'll try my best. there should be fairly regular updates since I've got a bit of the story already written out but who knows. hope you enjoy :)

before it begins

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

No one knew where the magic came from. There were legends of dragons and evil kings but no one truly knew where it all began. All that was known about magic was that it could be harnessed by the patient and strong-willed, used to create potions and enchantments and that it gave some the ability to control elements. They were called wielders, cleverly named because of their ability to wield the four basic elements of the universe: terra, aqua, wind, and flame.

Most wielders could control a single primary element and with much practice, they may be able to control its complementary to a lesser degree. For example: an experienced terra wielder could do simple wind manipulations. The same could be said of an aqua wielder with flame.

The boundaries of primary powers relied heavily on the mana of each wielder. The more mana a wielder had, the stronger and more wild their magic became. Powerful wielders struggled for decades to reign in their magic and wrestle it into something useful and not destructive.

Wielders were not uncommon in the overworld, making up nearly a third of the population. Often kids who displayed uncommonly strong welding capabilities were taken into special schools to train and focus on their abilities. However, many were free to live normal lives. Welding was a skill like any other to most people. Not everyone was a wielder like not everyone could be a blacksmith.

Still, occasionally legends would rise around particularly powerful Wielders. Those who could bend elements to their every whim, who twisted the world to achieve greatness. These wielders became something more, something eerily inhuman to most.

One such legend became known as the Winged King.

In a land blanketed by snow and frost, seemingly frozen in endless winter, there was a man. He was a brave man who had spent his youth adventuring and fighting. He was a man-made

of myth and legend. Whispers claimed he defeated entire armies single-handedly and his kingdom adored him. The people told stories of how he defeated the ice dragon plaguing their villages and how when he finally killed the beast, he took its wings and now used them to fly. He was said to possess enough mana to fully wield two elements, wind and terra.

But rumors are just that, rumors. Stories based in some truth, exaggerated beyond measure and twisted. Philza was a powerful man with an above-average amount of mana but he too was still a man and the laws of magic still applied.

He had spent his life cultivating his primary wield of wind and terra wielding had become easier over time. Yet, he still could do little more with the earth than create small walls.

However, the people did not see this. They saw the wings he wore like trophies, using them to glide along air currents. He's lived a long life, full of bloodshed and hardship, but he tried to live up to his people's praise.

The people rejoiced when he became king. His wedding to the Empire's princess was met only with praise, his legends having long since reached the capitol. The people cheered as wedding bells rung in the Empire's cathedral. He knew he was the luckiest man alive to have fallen for such a wonderful woman and for her to return his love.

Still, King Philza was a complicated man. He tried to be kind but his gentle demeanor did little to hide his blood-stained hands. He tried to leave his past behind when his wife first gave him an heir, but it was hard. The world beyond the frozen land called to him, he could hear whispers of adventure in the gusts of the winds which never ceased in the tundra.

Over time the whispers became harder and harder to ignore until he gave in and began traveling once more. He'd never go far, usually only a week's journey, but enough to satisfy him. As the years went on his trips became longer and more dangerous. He'd grown to love the feeling of his heart beating rapidly and blood thrumming through his veins again.

So, three years later, when his youngest son was born Phil didn't wait for the wind to call to him. He came and left as he pleased. Some part of him knew he should stay, help raise his sons, but his feet remained anchored to distant shores.

It was on these distant shores where he'd picked up his third son. A small boy, not much younger than his eldest, from a village that had been decimated by a curse, the child had been the only survivor. When Phil had seen the poor thing, covered in blood and weeping, he'd immediately scooped the boy into his arms and returned home for the first time that year.

However, the boy had not left his home village as unscathed as Phil originally thought. The curse that had destroyed his home had left him with voices in his head. They demanded blood and violence. They would scream for hours on end, leaving the boy crying out in pain. Phil had searched endlessly for a remedy but there was none.

So he stayed by the boy's side, guided him when the voices grew loud. He taught him how to fortify his mind and body. He named the boy and gave him a sword. The young boy was a survivor now, but he would grow into a warrior. He promised that he would stay as long as his son needed him.

As it would turn out, he wasn't needed very long, as the boy grew the voices seemed to dull. They were always present but they had learned to be quiet and sometimes even relayed helpful information to the boy. Phil was just relieved his son was no longer in pain and he found himself leaving with the wind once more.

For years Phil traveled the winds, not slowing down or halting, searching for adventures. He'd return home only for rest and to see his loving wife before leaving once more. He loved his queen endlessly, for she understood the importance of his freedom and allowed him to have it without complaint.

She would rule in his place as he fought wars and slain beasts because she loved him and he loved the wind beneath his wings. Phil knew she would rather he stay, learn to be a father and a king, but he couldn't bear to say no to the wind.

However, this changed after his wife died. She had gotten very sick whilst he was away on one of his adventures and hadn't lasted through the week. King Philza had returned to a palace covered in black and filled with cries of mourning. He'd received the news at the front gates and promptly fell to his feet weeping.

His sons were the ones to comfort him, but he only found this caused him more pain. Because with all his traveling he'd missed seeing his sons grow and the boys before him no

longer looked as he remembered them.

His youngest son was nearly seven, no longer the small babe he once held in his arms so gently. His older sons weren't toddlers speaking in broken attempts at sentences, they were nearing ten and his oldest seemed to have a vocabulary larger than his. He took each of their faces in his hands, searching for familiarity but he struggled to find any.

He had lost the love of his life and now he could only barely recognize his own sons. It was in that moment, as he sat weeping upon the ground and staring into the strange faces of his children, that he promised to be better.

So he stayed, when he heard his name whispered on the winds he turned his back and called for dinner. He watched his sons grow and even took in one more, a small servant boy. He remained by their sides and began to become their father once more. He loved his family, his children, his sons. They meant the world to him.

There was his eldest child, Wilbur, who reminded him so dearly of his late wife. The crown prince was a spitting image of the late queen and he shared her love for music. The boy could always be found with a lyre or flute in hand, ready to sing if given the chance. Some days it hurt Phil to watch his son play, when he would catch glimpses of his love only for her to disappear in a single note. On those days he held his eldest closer and taught him how to be a ruler like his mother. He would mourn the day Wilbur would be crowned. The burden of a king was not one he gave thoughtlessly, but Wil would be an amazing king.

Technoblade was his middle child and the most like him. Despite being adopted, he had inherited the same wanderlust that plagued Phil's own heart. Although, unlike Phil, his son was a warrior through and through. He had the bad habit of enjoying spilling blood. Where Wilbur was most at home with gentle hands strumming away and a song on his lips, Techno found his peace in violence. His middle son was quite the paradox. Always calm and collected, but somehow still the most violent of all his siblings. He was logical to a fault but refused to betray his own morals. Phil admired him for this, he would make a wonderful general, one that even Phil would happily follow into battle.

As he mentioned, Phil had also adopted another boy in recent years, the son of a gardener who had passed unexpectedly. Tubbo was a sweet boy with a kind disposition. He had a deep love of bees and an intrinsic need for chaos but it made the palace all the more lively in Phil's personal opinion. The boy was incredibly smart as well, rapidly going through tutors like

tissues as he began learning what his mind was capable of. Unlike Wilbur and Techno, who were rather fond of English and history, Tubbo was particularly gifted in alchemy and mathematics. Although his creations tended to wreak havoc on anyone in his immediate vicinity, Phil was immensely glad that Tubbo was a part of his family.

Then there was Tommy.

Thomas was a hard boy to explain. Where Wil looked like his mother, Tommy was a near twin of his father. They shared the same matching golden hair paired with those sparkling blue eyes and a wide smile that put people at ease. But the similarities between father and son ended there. Phil had always considered himself a rather stoic man, even as a child he was described as mild-mannered. Tommy, on the other hand, had come into the world screaming and had yet to stop. At every turn, the boy was there demanding attention for this or that.

Most days Phil had little time or patience for his youngest, so he had mostly been raised by servants. He still loved the boy, of course, that was his son after all. Tommy was hardworking and passionate, always busy with some new hobby or scheme. Which made it all the more difficult for Phil to spend time with the boy. Or at least that was his excuse for not having to stare at the son who reminded him of all his mistakes.

Phil liked to say each of his boys had a piece of him in them. Wilbur inherited his humor, his propensity for ill-timed jokes and sarcasm. Technoblade had gotten his sense of adventuring, his keen sense of direction and lust for life. Tubbo had received Phil's hunger for knowledge, his mind for redstone and his ability to pour over endless tomes with abandon. Tommy, well, Tommy had gotten his looks, so much so that sometimes it frightened Phil to see the ghost of his youth running down the halls.

What Phil failed to see was that Tommy had also inherited his heart, his unfaltering loyalty to those he loved, and the selflessness that inevitably followed. As loud and annoying as Tommy could be, he was twice as kind. Tommy would do anything for the ones he loved, even if they wouldn't do the same in return.

Tommy, despite what most may think, was not a complete idiot. He knew he was his father's least favorite, for whatever reason, so he often steered away from the man. Phil was an

imposing figure, despite his short stature (he had wings for star's sake, that alone was terrifying). Tommy figured it would be easier for both of them if he remained distant.

He also knew he greatly annoyed his brothers on his calmer days, so he tended to shy away from them as well. It would be a hot day in the star fields before he ended up on the receiving end of Tubbo's latest 'project' or one of Techno's swords. The only brother who he ever really talked to anymore was Wilbur but that was only because Wil would talk to anything that moved in his near vicinity.

The first half of his life hadn't been like that though. Up until he was seven, before his mom got sick and his father came back, he was actually rather close to his family. Even if his father was gone all the time, he'd had his mother and Wil, and later on Techno too. His mom would teach him how to sew and play piano. She would help him create pictures to give to his brother when he'd finished his lessons.

Wilbur would always play wizards or countries with him once he was done with the day's lessons. He would let Tommy weave flowers into his hair while he told the younger about far-off nations. He gave Tommy the world in words and Tommy soaked it all in. His big brother was his hero, not that he'd ever tell him. Wilbur always made fun of him when he said stuff like that.

When Technoblade came things were different at first. Phil had stayed for nearly a year but even then, Tommy hadn't really interacted with his father. The king had been really busy with his new brother, who had the longest, pinkest hair Tommy had ever seen. *It was so cool.* After Phil left, he found himself around his newest sibling more often. Techno would let him braid his hair and never laughed at the drawings he gave him like Wil did.

Some evenings they would all gather in their mom's room and she'd play piano and Wil would sing, and Tommy would sit on the floor braiding Techno's hair as he hummed along.

Then his mom died and they closed off her quarters, his dad came home and there were no more piano lessons and suddenly he saw less and less of his brothers. Wilbur started taking his lessons more seriously and Techno was always in the training grounds. Tommy had started hanging out in the gardens more often than not and playing with Tubbo.

He'd met Tubbo when the shorter boy had saved him from a swarm of bees who'd been attacking him. Somehow the servant boy had managed to *call off the bees* and so Tommy offered to help him plant some flowers as thanks.

He'd kept going back to the gardens after that and running around the trees and flowers playing games with Tubbo. He was smarter than Tommy gave him credit for and usually helped him come up with their plans. Tommy thought Tubbo was a bit too cautious in his idea but he was easy enough to convince when needed so he made a good partner for the young prince.

Like every time previous in his life, tragedy came swiftly and unexpectedly. Tubbo's dad had passed away because of a heart attack and the boy was going to be sent away since he had no other family. Tommy had insisted that Phil keep him in the palace as a servant or apprentice.

Unsurprisingly Phil had immediately taken Tubbo under his wings, metaphorically and literally. They would spend hours in the library together doing stars knows what. Tommy never had enough patience or interest to join them.

It wasn't long after the first time Phil met Tubbo that he'd declared the boy his ward and a member of the royal family. Tommy was excited at first, his best friend was now his brother! Then it started to feel a bit like his family liked Tubbo more than him.

Wilbur started coming to dinners again to get to know his new younger brother better. He would play songs for Tubbo, which he never did when Tommy asked anymore. And Techno offered to give Tubbo sword lessons, which was an offer never extended to Tommy before. Even Phil spent time with Tubbo in the library working on potions together.

Tommy was glad his family liked Tubbo, don't misunderstand, but he would be lying if he said he wasn't jealous of his friend.

Tubbo, himself, even started spending less time with Tommy and more time with his family and his new servant, Ranboo. Ranboo was a bitch in Tommy's humble opinion. A best friend stealing bitch boy who he'd have kicked out of the palace if Tubbo hadn't liked him so much.

He'd tried to make them involve him. He would follow Tubbo around or try to annoy Wilbur into singing for him but each time he'd just get yelled at. So he got louder, more obnoxious, hoping they wouldn't be *able* to ignore him but in the end, they just avoided him more.

Most days Tommy felt more like a ghost than a prince, floating forgotten through hallways only acknowledged by the staff. Occasionally he would break into his mother's room and play on her piano, lonely notes echoing through the abandoned wing. His family would probably be unhappy with him for disturbing her room but none of them had set foot in the wing since her death so they remained none the wiser.

His mother's quarters held his favorite memories. The ones filled with joy and family. Ones that felt as if they came from a different life, a less lonely life. Sometimes Tommy would cry alone in his mother's old, dusty bedsheets. He'd mourn the life and family he used to have. He hadn't known it then but when his mom died so did any chance of family for Tommy.

He was doomed to a life of loneliness within the palace walls.

Perhaps this loneliness was the cause of his recent escapades. Maybe he snuck out of the palace into the city because he wanted someone to realize he was missing. Maybe he just didn't want to have to pretend to be the little, happy forgotten prince all day every day for the rest of his life.

Like all of Tommy's plans, it began as just an idea, a what if? What if he went into the capitol city? What if he could be a regular citizen for a few hours? Was it possible? Would he be recognized? If he was caught, would his family notice him?

So, he channeled his inner Technoblade and watched and waited. He bided his time, learning the guard schedules and looked over the quickest routes to and from the city. It had taken weeks of preparations and probably the most planning any plan of Tommy's had before but he knew it would be worth it.

Once he had everything ready, he asked his favorite cook in the kitchens, Clara, if he could borrow some normal clothes. Tommy may not be the brightest, but he had enough common sense to know he would get mugged in a back alley at knifepoint if he wore his current bejeweled attire.

And so with new clothes and a mischievous smile, Tommy left the next morning as the light of dawn began peaking above the horizon. He waited for the night guard to leave and weaseled his lanky fifteen-year-old body between the bars of the gate on the southside of the outer walls. He was out of sight by the time the morning guard had gotten situated.

He walked along the dirt road leading towards the city, his boots crunching softly in the untouched morning snow. It was the beginning of the summer months in the Antarctic which meant a good deal of sunlight and minimal snowfall. It was Tommy's favorite time because he could walk outside in little more than a cloak and be fine.

It was like this, clad in little more than thick pants and a cloak, Tommy marched into the capitol for the first, but certainly not the last, time.

This is where our story really begins.

Chapter End Notes

ahah hope you enjoyed the first chapter. just some world-building: if it wasn't made clear most of the magic in this is based off of Minecraft (ei. potions and enchantments) but wielding is really similar to bending, Philza was not royalty (he only became king because he married the princess of the Empire) which is why he can go off adventuring and fighting even after he gets married, the Antarctic is not the only kingdom/country in the world just the only one we've been introduced to so far. if you have any questions I'm happy to answer them :)

the market place and a sad return

Chapter Summary

Tommy goes into the city and meets a friend but somehow still returns to the castle as lonely as ever.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The city was dirtier than Tommy expected but he didn't mind much. There were so many people here too, it felt like there wasn't even enough space for them all. He'd already bumped into four people and it had barely been ten minutes!

Eventually, he found himself on the edge of a market square as the sun began to peek over the roofs of nearby buildings. It was so colorful in this area, compared to the dark and grimy streets he'd just come from. Long pieces of fabric hung over carts and booths, there were even a few tents dotting the middle of the square. Along the edges stood buildings whose storefronts faced inwards towards the square.

People moved in and amongst the stalls while merchants were calling out goods and deals. A few little kids ran past him, one girl dragging a frayed ribbon behind her. There was so much laughter and life here, he couldn't even imagine the palace like this.

He stood gawking for a moment, soaking in the rays of early sunlight, and then turned to the nearest booth. The lettering painted on the wooden sign that hung above told him it sold bread and pastries. As the scent of warm bread wafted towards Tommy, his stomach began to growl. He hadn't eaten since before he'd left the palace and that was hours ago, it would be lunchtime soon.

The lady running the booth was laughing with another man. She seemed busy so he figured he could take a moment to browse. Quickly, he strode up to the booth and looked at the different baked goods. There was a flaky pastry labeled as strawberry tart and what looked to be a chocolate muffin, both of which looked amazing. His mouth was watering at the pleasant smells wafting through the air.

“Hey, kid, can I get you anything?” He jumped at the unexpected voice of the lady.

“Uhm—I was just looking!” he stuttered.

“Well, you seem like an éclair kind of guy. I’ve got a batch in the back if you want to look at those too?” She smiled at him.

He had to pause for a moment to think if he’d ever had an éclair. The desert seemed foreign to him but if it was half as good as anything out here looked, he was sure he’d love it.

His hand drifted into his pocket, counting the money he’d brought with him. It wasn’t much, only a few gold and silver pieces and he didn’t want to spend it all on lunch.

“I’m not actually sure what those are,” he confessed. His ears turned red as the nice lady laughed.

“That’s alright, they’re a pastry I learned to make in Essempee, not many people here knew about ‘em until I started making ‘em. Now people can’t get enough of them!” She explained, laughing gently as she did so.

They sounded expensive and Tommy’s hand once again found the coins in his pants. After a moment of debating with himself, he decided it wasn’t worth it. “That’s okay, how much for a tart, muffin, and loaf of bread?” He asked, staring towards his feet.

“Hmm, since you’re a first-time customer I’ll give you a bit of a discount. How about a silver and two copper pieces?”

“I, uh I only have two silver pieces, is that okay?” He asked nervously, reaching into his pocket and pulling out two silver coins.

"Of course, if you wait here a moment, I'll give you back some iron for the difference," she laughed as she disappeared behind a section of cloth, only to remerge a moment later with a basket and coin in hand. "Here you can keep this basket and bring it back to me next time?"

"Okay, thank you so much, uh" he paused, realizing he never got the nice lady's name.

"Oh you can call me Niki," she offered.

"Right, thank you, Niki," he grinned, taking the basket and extra iron coins.

He waved goodbye to Niki as he headed farther into the market. He was proud of himself for his successful food acquisition. Now it was time for exploration.

He began munching on the strawberry tart as he looked at different stalls filled with brightly colored gems and bolts of fabrics. There were even a few that had weapons, there was a really cool sword that caught his eye. Techno would have liked it a lot. Tommy glanced at the sign above the table it laid on '20 gold or above', then again Techno had plenty of swords.

He continued through the market, just looking and taking in the new sights. He hadn't been this happy in forever. The noise and chaos of the marketplace seemed to soothe a part of him that the quiet palace was never able to.

When the yelling started Tommy had been looking through a stall that sold different types of jams and preserves. A jar of honey had caught his eye, and just as he was buying it, he heard the commotion. At first, he couldn't make out what was being but as the yelling got closer, he understood.

"Thief! Thief! Stop him!" A portly man with a large beard was yelling, red in the face from running. The man had a black apron stretched tightly around his neck and waist and he was waving a rather long sword.

As the thief bolted past, Tommy caught a brief glimpse of them. The lower half of their face was covered but their eyes were a vivid purple, he could see the mischief sparkling in them even from a distance. The thief looked young too, around his age perhaps. Tommy found himself grinning and cheering the young thief on.

Evidentially not everyone was on the thief's side as a larger man stepped into the thief's path and grabbed them by the scruff. The thief started yelling and struggling, trying to escape the grip but to no avail.

"Let go of me you stupid oaf!" the thief yelled. Tommy winced, insulting the large man was not going to help him.

The portly shop keep eventually caught up, huffing and completely out of breath. "You—brat—I am—going to—turn you—over to the—guards!" he shouted between pants.

"Fuck you!" The thief kicked harder, trying to twist out of the grip but to no avail.

Tommy, ever the chaos demon, decided now might be a fine time to step in. "Hi, sorry couldn't help but overhear all the yelling you lot were doing. What was stolen?" he flashed his brightest smile at the rounder man.

He seemed taken aback for a moment before looking at Tommy, clad in servant clothes with strawberry tart and honey all over his face, with mild distaste. "He's taken a dagger from my stand for a *second* time!"

"Are you sure it was him?" Tommy asked innocently, purposefully widening his eyes a bit like when he'd ask for a second dessert from the kitchen staff. It always worked.

Again the shopkeeper looked taken aback by him. "Yes, I'm sure! It's the second time he's done it!" he spluttered.

"The second time? Well sounds like it's your fault." Tommy grinned as heard snickering from behind him.

"My fault? How is it my fault? He's the one stealing from me!" the older man cried, clearly frustrated with him now.

"Well, you should've gotten better security after the first robbery. You know that saying: steal from me once, shame on you, but steal from me twice and that's totally on me."

Now the shopkeeper was confused *and* angry, but he was paying less attention to the thief behind him, and the man holding the thief was also distracted by the strange child. With a well-placed jab to the strong man's stomach, the thief was able to wriggle free from his captor and booked it once more, this time grabbing Tommy as he ran.

The two ran through back alleys and shortcuts, Tommy following closely behind the masked thief. Eventually, the shouting behind them faded and they were left panting in a small space underneath the city docks.

They waited there until they were sure the coast was clear then pulled themselves back up onto the docks. It only took a few moments for them to catch their breath, but they broke into laughter after one glance.

"That was amazing! Where did you learn to spout bullshit like that?" the thief asked as the laughter subsided.

He'd pulled down his mask to reveal what Tommy had already expected, a young boy. They were about the same age if Tommy had to guess but the thief was a few inches shorter him. His ash-blonde hair fell to one side, knotted and in need of a trim, it was what Techno would have called 'unkempt' and 'scraggly'. Tommy didn't care though; he wasn't one to care much about hair management anyway.

"The stars gifted me with numerous abilities, spouting bullshit is just one of them," he shrugged, causing the other boy to snort.

“Fair enough, thanks for helping me out back there. I’m Purpled.” He stuck out his hand and Tommy shook it.

“Tommy, and it was my pleasure. I haven’t had this much fun in ages!”

“Would have been a lot more fun without the almost getting caught and turned over to the royal guards part.” Purpled’s words sounded annoyed but his grin betrayed him.

“Did you actually steal that guy’s dagger? Twice?” Tommy asked, rocking back and force on his heels.

Purpled laughed at his excitement and pulled out a gleaming silver dagger. The handle was delicately carved with flame symbols, a wielder weapon. No wonder the shopkeeper was so pissed, those were *expensive*. Techno and Wil each had one, but they were swords, not knives and Techno had still complained for days about how over the top the gift was (even though he hadn’t stopped grinning for days afterward).

Tommy whistled lowly, “Damn, that’s a flame weapon!”

Purpled looked at him curiously, “How did you know that?”

Tommy stared at him for a moment before pointing at the handle and said in his flattest voice, “I don’t know maybe it was the flame runes carved all over the thing.”

Purpled rolled his eyes, “Yeah, duh, but not many villagers can recognize flame runes. Where’d you learn about ‘em?”

Shit, shit, shit, time to lie. “My brother is a flame wielder and he’s always wanted one,” he gave a half-truth. Techno was his brother and he was a flame wielder. But the honest truth

was Phil had made sure all of the princes were well studied in terms of wielding magic, especially when it came to weaponry.

“No way, that’s sick! Is he like a part of the guard?” Purpled started bouncing slightly in his excitement.

The royal guard was made up almost entirely of wielders, many of which were flame wielders since their magic relied the least on their surroundings and more on personal strength. Since they could literally create fire with their minds while the other three types of wielders had to rely on the universe around them to pull from. Tommy often wished he was a flame wielder, they were sick.

“Something like that,” Tommy replied uneasily. Another half-truth, one-day Techno *would* be in the guard as the general, he just wasn’t in it yet.

They were quiet for a moment, neither boy saying much. However, it didn’t take long for the silence to be broken by Purpled’s stomach growling. The thief blushed a bit, coughing to try and cover the noise. Tommy still heard it though. Laughing he rummaged through the basket Niki had given him earlier and found the loaf of bread. He broke off a piece and handed it towards Purpled.

The boy only glanced at the bread suspiciously, not making any move to take it. “Stars above, it’s not poisoned, see!” He tore off another piece and popped it in his mouth.

Purpled hesitantly reached out only to snatch the bread out his hand as if Tommy would take it back at the last second. Tommy grinned and raised his hands in mock surrender. “You’re welcome to have more.”

He plopped down on the edge of the docks, allowing his feet to swing over the side, and placed the basket next to him. He left the rest of the loaf on the top of the basket so Purpled could take more if he wanted to. He also took out the jar of honey he’d gotten earlier and put some on his piece of bread. In case Purpled wanted some too, he left the lid off.

“Thanks, normally I would just mooch off Punz’s food but he’s gone for the week,” Purpled told him, sitting down next to him and scooping some honey onto his own bread.

“Punz?” he asked, the name unfamiliar.

“My older brother, kind of. He’s like a merc for hire,” Purpled said, his voice proud. Tommy was a little shocked he would tell a random stranger his brother was a mercenary.

“Shouldn’t you not tell me your brother is like a criminal?” he pointed out.

“Nah, if you try and tell anyone he’ll just kill ya!” Purpled grinned wildly. Tommy couldn’t stop himself from laughing. Perhaps he should be scared but honestly, he really liked Purpled.

So there they sat on the edge of the docks and watched the ships come and go, splitting the rest of the bread and muffin between them.

“What’s this?” Purpled asked, holding up a small piece of dough that looked like it was covered in chocolate. Tommy hadn’t ordered that, had he?

He took it gently and looked at it, it didn’t look like any dessert he’d ever seen. Then he recalled his conversation from this morning with Niki.

“I think it’s an éclair?” he said unsure. He tore it in half, surprised but pleased to find it filled with cream, and handed the other half to Purpled. They both bit into it hesitantly and moaned.

“Damn, that’s good! Where’d you get it?” Purpled asked.

“Some lady named Niki, she told me I would like them, but I didn’t want to waste my money,” Tommy explained.

“Next time waste more money, I could eat those for the rest of my life,” Purpled groaned.

“I agree, next time we’re getting a shit ton of these,” he laughed.

They continued to talk and watch the boats until Tommy’s sides hurt from laughing and his cheeks ached from smiling. Eventually, the sun passed the middle of the sky and he knew he should get back soon.

Begrudgingly he began to pack up. Tommy really didn’t want to leave but he’d already missed lunch and the palace was probably searching for him, so he bid goodbye to his friend.

“I need to get back home soon, but I might be back tomorrow. Will you meet me by Niki’s stall in the market in the morning?” he asked, hopeful.

Purpled thought about it for a moment. “Only if you get breakfast,” he agreed.

Tommy placed a hand on his chest in mock offense, “You only want me for my food!”

“I thought that was obvious?” Purpled joked.

“And to think I was going to give you my last piece of muffin. Not anymore dickhead,” he laughed while Purpled tried to yell apologies as he started walking away. He turned around and shoved the rest of the chocolate muffin in his mouth so his friend would see. Purpled flipped him off but Tommy just turned back around laughing.

The path back to the palace was a bit longer than the one he took that morning. He had to loop around the far side of the palace grounds and sneak in through the east gate, praying the guards would be sleeping in the high noon sun like normal. The path wound through dark

woods and he paused behind a large oak at the edge of the tree line and looked towards the guard tower.

Sure enough, there was no one standing watch and he was able to slip back through the gate and into the palace. They probably needed better security but honestly who would be stupid enough to attack King Philza in the first place?

Once inside Tommy moved quickly through the palace, making sure to listen for servants and guards. After a few close calls, he was able to sneak into the kitchens undetected. Although, even if he had been caught, it wasn't strange to find him slinking about hallways he wasn't supposed to be in.

In all honesty, he probably could have lied his way out of any trouble he got into but sneaking around was just more fun.

Nonetheless, he entered the kitchens grinning from ear to ear. A small servant girl saw him and immediately called out "Clara, the gremlin prince is here!"

"Oi! I'm not a gremlin, *Clementine*" he shouted at her, putting extra emphasis when saying her full name because he knew she hated it.

Clementine stuck opened her mouth, a scathing retort ready, but was interrupted.

"Yes, you are," Clara's warm voice rang through the kitchen, you could always hear her above the normal clatter of the kitchens. "But it's why we love you."

Clara was his favorite servant. She'd been a cook in the castle since before he was born and, though she was old enough to be his grandmother, in the years after his mom's death she'd become like a surrogate mother. She'd taught him how to cook and she always gave the best advice. But best of all, she listened to him and all his stories, which was exactly what he wanted right now.

Clara had just come out of the storage room but moved quickly across the kitchen to him. When she was close enough she opened her arms.

“You and Clara just like to bully me,” he grumbled but accepted the hug from the older woman. She squeezed him tightly and Tommy could smell the scent of rosemary and basil that always seemed to follow Clara. When she pulled away, he noticed she was frowning.

“We were worried when you didn’t show up for dessert after lunch,” she told him, the unsaid question lingering in the air.

“Right, I met a friend in town and lost track of time but we ate lunch together,” he told her, not able to meet her gaze. He hated upsetting Clara; she had always been so kind to him.

“Well, I’m glad you’re safe and that you’ve made a friend,” she told him warmly, patting his arm sweetly.

“Did anyone else notice my absence?” he asked quietly.

“Not that I know of, I’m sorry honey.” She squeezed his shoulder.

No one had noticed he was gone? Tommy hated to admit it, but he wasn’t surprised. It was just like his brothers and father to be completely unaware of him.

Clara knew how much Tommy wanted his family to acknowledge him, to pay attention to him. She didn’t know if his family ever would give him the love he deserved so she would give him all the love she had to spare. Clara knew it wasn’t enough, but it was something.

Sensing the sadness, Clementine set aside her rolling pin and came to join them. “You have to tell me everything!”

Tommy brightened immediately recalling all of the things he’d seen in the city.

“It was so cool! There were all these shops and stalls! You should have seen this one sword, it had this gold handle that was so sick but it was super expensive so I didn’t get it. Then there was all this yelling and it turns out this kid stole a really cool knife from this asshole shopkeeper—”

“Your new friend I’m guessing.” Clara shook her head in disappointment, but her smile betrayed her true feelings.

“Please tell me you did not make friends with a *thief!*” Clementine groaned.

“Okay, I did not make friends with a thief,” he parroted back to her. She threw a towel towards him. “HEY!” he shouted and threw it back towards her.

“No throwing things in the kitchens, kids,” Clara scolded them.

“Sorry, Miss Clara,” they both grumbled.

“Besides Purpled’s really cool! He can run super fast and he curses almost worse than me. He taught me a new one it’s fi—”

“He sounds lovely,” Clara interrupted him, her eyes twinkled with amusement.

“He’s great! We’re meeting again tomorrow!” He told them excitedly.

“That’s wonderful, honey!” Clara laughed.

“You better get going if you want to be able to clean up before dinner,” Clementine told him, pointing towards his dirty clothes.

“Balls! Clara do you have any clothes I can borrow for tomorrow?” He asked, smiling innocently.

The older woman rolled her eyes and swatted at him. “I’ll send some up with Michael tonight, now shoo!” she gently shoved him towards the doors.

He yelled his tanks as he slipped out of the kitchens. As he wandered the corridors back towards his room and the warmth of the kitchen seeped from him, he started to think. He’d been gone for hours, nearly half a day, and his family hadn’t noticed.

How long would it take for them to notice?

The question bounced around his head the entire way back to his room and as he began to dress for dinner.

How far would he be able to push his freedom before his family would realize what he was up to? They were all so caught up in his own things, he had half the mind to think they may never notice.

He quickly dismissed those thoughts. Of course, his family would note his absence and worry. They probably had realized he was gone but didn’t want to worry any of the staff so had kept quiet about it. That had to be it and they would ask him why he hadn’t been at lunch during dinner and his worries would be put to rest. Right?

He ignored the small voice in his head telling him that if Techno had skipped lunch, everyone would have helped search for him and drag him back to the table. His family would put his mind to rest, he just knew they would.

They were already on the third course out of four and his family had yet to ask about his absence. Tommy was about ready to cry.

“So, Thomas,” Phil started. Tommy looked up from his steak, *this was it*. “What did you do today?” Tommy’s shoulders slumped, it wasn’t quite what he’d wanted but it was close enough.

“Just hung out,” he muttered, pushing his potatoes around.

“Did you go to lessons?” Phil sounded exasperated.

Oh, that’s what it was. Phil didn’t care what he’d been doing all day, he was upset he’d missed his lessons. He always wanted Tommy to go to lessons and learn boring useless shit. It wasn’t like he was ever going to be king so why the fuck did he need to learn stupid stuff like history.

His silence was answer enough. “I really wish you would take your studies more seriously, Thomas.” Phil was using his ‘I’m disappointed in you’ voice. Tommy fought back an eye roll.

“Yeah, you got it, big man.” They both knew he didn’t mean it.

His brothers, who had gone quiet as Phil scolded him, started talking once more.

“Did you know the average honey bee has all these odorant receptors so they have a really great sense of smell so they can tell the difference between flowers?” Tubbo told the table.

“Really, that’s pretty cool,” Wilbur smiled at the brunette.

Tommy tuned out the rest of dinner, only answering questions directed towards him and asking to be dismissed right after dessert was served. If any of his family thought his

behavior was strange, no one made note of it.

He laid on his bed staring at the clothes Michael must have brought up sometime during dinner. They were nicer than today's but still well worn. He had wanted to ask why Clara had these clothes but something in him told him to just leave it. Maybe it was the sad look she'd gotten when she'd first seen him in them.

Sighing he placed the clothes back on his dresser and changed into his sleepwear before heading to bed and turning off the lights.

Yet, despite how draining dinner had been for him he found it hard for himself to fall asleep. He was too excited to see Purled again. He stared at the mural of the night sky painted on his ceiling, tracing the different constellations and naming them.

Aquarius. Aries. Cygnus. Gemini. Lyra. Ursa Major and Minor.

His finger followed a familiar path over and over again as he began to feel sleep come to him. He smiled tracing a small clump of stars not a part of any known constellation.

Regina.

He allowed his eyes to slip shut and his mind to fall into darkness.

Chapter End Notes

i will never promise updates this quick ever again but i'm just really enjoying writing this rn so here ya go. also i thought a lot about having tommy just run away right off the bat but it felt wrong because he really does love his family, he just wants attention. i felt like it made more sense for him to leave for a day with the idea that his family would be worried and looking for him when he got back, only to be hurt further when he realized no one had really noticed :) hope you enjoyed!

something akin to the definition of insanity

Chapter Summary

Tommy returns to the city for the day and dinner at the palace ends up being even more disappointing than usual.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He followed the same path he took yesterday to reach Niki's stall. When he arrived he didn't see Purpled yet so he began to look through the pastries. Yesterday's had been delicious and was excited to get more, plus Niki was really sweet.

He'd even managed to remember to bring the basket Niki gave him yesterday to return. He took a deep breath, taking in the smell of warm bread and sweet chocolate.

"I see you're back for more." Niki laughed as he jumped. He joined in with her laughter.

"Yep, I think I fell in love with your eclairs. Thanks for that by the way," he told her honestly. Niki just winked at him playfully.

"I'm glad, but if you're going to be regular I should probably know your name," she informed him, her hands on her hips.

"I'm a minor you know?" he teased her. Niki's jaw dropped, shocked at his words.

"I—Yeah I could figure that out, kid you look like you're 12!" It was Tommy's mouth that dropped this time. He squawked indignantly.

"I'm not a kid and I'm 14, not 12! I'm basically an adult," he shouted.

“Okay sure, but unless you give me your name I’ll be forced to call you kid,” she smirked.

“You win this round, you can call me Tommy the Big Man. It’s my official title,” he said, extending his hand for her to shake.

Niki took it with a grin. “Pleasure to meet you Tommy the Big man.”

“Well now that introductions are over can I get two muffins, one poppy and one chocolate, a raspberry scone, one croissant, and a loaf of bread and two éclairs?” he ordered. “Oh, and I brought back you’re basket!” He handed it over to her, she took it with a smile and began placing more pastries in it.

“Thanks, but you can keep it. If you bring it with you, I can just put your stuff in it,” she told him. “Your total’s gonna be two silver pieces!”

He pulled out two silver pieces from his pockets and took the basket from her once more.
“Thanks, Niki, you’re the best!” He said as he waved goodbye.

He stayed close to the stall waiting for Purpled to show up. He started eating a bit of the poppy muffin while he waited.

“You actually bought that stuff?” Purpled’s voice sounded beside him and Tommy nearly dropped his muffin.

“Stars, Purpled! Warn a guy before giving him a heart attack,” he glared at Purpled’s smirk. “And for your information, yes I did pay for it. Niki’s really nice and it wouldn’t be very pog of me to steal from her,” he sniffed.

“Pog?” Purpled questioned as he caught the croissant Tommy threw at him.

“Yeah, not very big man like, you know?” Tommy explained.

“No, not really,” Purpled said, ripping off a piece of croissant and popping it into his mouth

“It’ll catch on, trust me.”

“If you say so, wanna rob some shit?”

“Hell yeah, thought you’d never ask!”

Tommy was not easily impressed, he was a prince for star’s sake, he grew up with the infamous Technoblade and Wilbur as brothers. Little in this world could ever truly impress a man after he’d seen the *Blade* disarm and incapacitate half the royal guard in under ten minutes. Yet, as Tommy watched Purpled dart between stalls, deft fingers picking up trinkets and items with practiced ease, he was a little bit impressed. *It was cool, okay!*

On a more daring attempt, he managed to snag a fancy looking ring with a large red gemstone in the middle from the center of a stall’s display. He walked away whistling and rubbing the ring against his sleeve as if he was cleaning it.

“You’re probably only getting more dirt on it,” Tommy teased once the other was in earshot. The other teen just flipped him off and tucked the ring into his pocket.

“It’s your turn,” Purpled told him as he sidled up beside him, nudging him gently with a shoulder.

“For what?” Tommy asked, completely bewildered.

Purpled snorted. “To catch a falling star, what do you think idiot? To go snatch somethin’, obviously!”

“I can’t steal shit!” He screeched, if he got caught and his father found out he’d be stuck in lessons for months.

“Why not?” Purpled cocked a brow. Tommy sputtered and waved his hands around trying to figure out an excuse.

“I—Well, you see—it’s more like I uh—fine, I’ve never stolen anything before, I don’t know how,” he stuttered.

“You don’t know how to steal? It’s easy you just take something, put it in your pocket, and walk away,” Purpled explained, exasperated. Tommy shifted uneasily which must’ve caught Purpled’s eye because the next thing he said was, “You’re not a pussy, are you? Afraid of getting caught?”

“I’m not a pussy, man! I’m a big man, the hugest! I steal all the time, whenever I want really!” Tommy squawked. Purpled shot him a smug smirk and he realized he’d just fucked up big time.

“Oh yeah, prove it. Go steal something from over there and bring it back to me.”

The stall he pointed at was one of the smaller ones. Scattered around the shelves and floor were books. There were only a few customers, but the owner seemed to be engaged in a pretty lively conversation with one of them.

He could do this, easy peasy, no big deal. He’d just walk up and grab something on the nearest rack then bolt. With his decisions made, Tommy squared his shoulders and walked over to the bookstall.

He pretended to thumb through a few different books, trying to blend in with the other customers. He remembered what Wilbur used to tell him when they would sneak around the palace and steal pastries from the kitchens.

"If you act like you belong, no one will think you don't. Just be confident and comfortable." Then he would shove Tommy headfirst into the kitchens. He was never worried about being caught with Wilbur because even if someone did stop them Wil always had a lie ready on the tip of his tongue. He always knew what to say to a guard so they'd let them pass.

But he didn't have Wilbur with his silver tongue to get him out of trouble here, so he needed to be careful. He continued to glance through the books, subtly looking for a small one he could slip under his cloak and walk away. Then he saw it.

On the shelf in front of him was a simple blue book with gold detailing along the edges and spine. But it wasn't the cover that caught his attention, it was the title: "The Art of War". Techno's favorite book.

He could feel his fingers twitch, this was the one he wanted. So he reached out and tried to copy the motions he'd seen Purpled do all morning. A quick cursory glance to see if anyone was looking at him, light fingers and suddenly the book was under his cloak. He tried to walk away as inconspicuously as possible and prayed for a clean getaway.

However, the stars didn't seem to approve of his prayers and suddenly he heard a shout, "Stop there, young man!" Yeah no, Tommy broke out into a sprint. He could see Purpled far off in the distance shaking with laughter.

Tommy risked a glance back to see the man behind him start to chase after him but before he could get very far Tommy willed the ground in front of him to rise an inch or so. The shopkeeper's foot hit the uneven ground and gave way, his body following suit, and he fell to the ground. He slowed for a moment to make sure no one had noticed what he'd done and when he'd decided he was in the clear he quickened his pace once more.

By the time he reached Purpled, his friend was bent over laughing.

"I can't—believe you—managed to—get away!" he said between gasps.

“Yeah, haha super funny, asshole. Let’s go somewhere else now before we get caught,” he grumbled, tugging his friend through the stalls and further into the market.

“Oh come one, you’ve got to admit it was pretty hilarious! You should have seen your face when he started shouting, I didn’t even know eyes could get that wide! And then he tripped like just ate shit. You’re so lucky, he totally would’ve caught you otherwise,” Purpled laughed. Tommy shot him a glare but a moment later he was grinning too.

“Yeah, super lucky,” he muttered, *total luck*.

“Don’t get all pouty, it was funny,” Purpled insisted

“It was only a little bit funny,” Tommy conceded, his heartbeat finally slowing down.

“Next time pick something smaller to steal, would ya? Stealing an encyclopedia is like asking to be caught,” Purpled laughed pointing at the thick book Tommy had stuffed into his cloak.

“It’s not an encyclopedia, asshole, it’s a book called ‘The Art of War’ and that sounded pretty pog to me!” Tommy shoved Purpled who shoved him right back. They both broke out into laughter again.

“Fine but my point still stands, steal smaller things. Oh, and relax your shoulders you look suspicious with them hanging out by your ears all the time,” Purpled told him. Tommy forced himself to calm a bit and let his shoulders fall.

“Fuck off, stealing’s stressful man,” he groaned.

“Sure, champ, I believe you,” Purpled sent him a smug look, ignoring the curse Tommy yelled towards him. “Should we try and swipe some alcohol from unsuspecting adults?”

“Do I have many wives?”

“Uh, I’m not sure?”

“Fuck you, asshole! I have many wives, the most amount of wives, I am the wife haver!”

“I’ll take your word for it.”

And so the teens continued to wreak havoc on the market square until they were chased down to the docks again by angry merchants. They sat in the spot as they had yesterday and Tommy opened up his basket. They ate the loaf of bread together while Tommy took the raspberry scone and let Purpled have the chocolate muffin.

Purpled had profusely thanked Tommy when he handed over one of the éclairs. Both boys scarfed down the dessert, grinning at each other.

He hadn’t known Purpled very long but there was a strange sort of connection between them, they just understood each other. Purpled always laughed at his jokes and egged him on when most people would try to stop him. It was nice to finally have someone like him for once.

He didn’t have to worry about Purpled being friends with him to get closer to the crown or try and gain favors, to Purpled he was just Tommy and just Tommy was good enough.

For the first time in a long time being himself was good enough for someone else. No fake smiles or empty promises, just laughter and mischief. Stars above, he wouldn’t trade it for the world.

He wondered for a moment how Purpled would react to finding out he was royalty or even a terra wielder for that matter. He tried to keep his wielding on the down-low since sometimes he could lose control and shit things happened when he lost control. Besides, as far as he could tell, Purpled was normal. What if he didn’t like wielders? Or maybe he just didn’t want to be friends with a prince?

Purpled leaned over, as if sensing his friend's panic, and let his head rest on Tommy's shoulder. The younger laughed gently and slung an arm around his friend's shoulder.

They didn't talk much, just watched the ships, but there was a sense of friendship he'd never had before.

Not even with Tubbo.

"I think you're my best friend," he told Purpled. The ashy blonde teenager turned to face Tommy, eyes wide.

"Pog."

Both boys collapsed into a fit of laughter.

They ended up feeding their leftovers to the fish and walked back through the city. They'd wander through different parts of the city and Purpled would point out different buildings or alleys and give him little anecdotes about them.

"That alley is where I got stabbed one time, but Punz stitched me up so well that there's barely any scar."

"That's Ponk's place, he a kinda crazy but he's friends with my brother so sometimes we crash there."

"Oh, oh, over there is where I did my first ever successfully pickpocket! And over there is where I made my first pickpocket event."

"Isn't that where you got stabbed for the first time?" Tommy interrupted the tour.

“Huh, weird.” Purpled shrug and moved on. “That’s my favorite butcher shop to steal from.”

When he got bored of playing twisted tour guide, he liked to show Tommy different games. His favorite was when he’d ask Tommy to point out a stranger on the street, then he’d slink towards them and ‘accidentally’ bump into them. Each time he’d come back with some new treasure. A pocket watch, a few coins, one time he even got a strange-looking feather.

Each time Tommy was sure they’d get caught, someone would feel Purpled rooting through their pockets and cry out. But each time no one noticed, nothing happened. Eventually, Tommy started picking harder targets and the game got even more thrilling.

Purpled told him the game didn’t end until they got caught and for a while Tommy was pretty sure it would never end. Until he pointed out a well-dressed couple. Purpled had gotten his hand halfway into the woman’s coat pocket when the guy noticed. He gave a loud yell and that was all Purpled and Tommy needed so they booked it.

Much to his delight and terror, the guy gave chase. He followed them through the streets, not giving up until he’d cornered them in a dark alley. He seemed angry, like really angry, and something shiny caught Tommy’s eye. A horrific realization dawned on him.

“*Knife*,” he breathed quietly, and he knew Purpled heard him by the way he felt his friend’s frame stiffen.

“*We’re so fucked*,” Purpled whispered back.

“*Dude, how do you usually get out of these kinds of situations?*” Tommy hissed.

“*Punz always stops it before it gets this far*,” Purpled looked genuinely afraid for the first time.

Tommy decided it was time to take matters into his own hands. Turns out Purpled would be learning some of his secrets earlier than expected. *Let’s hope he’s got nothing against wielders.* He pushed any of his worries about Purpled’s reaction away and tried to remember his lessons.

Instead of waiting for the man to charge at them first, Tommy closed his eyes and focused on the ground in front of him.

Purpled hissed something but he was too focused on the task at hand to listen to his friend. He breathed in and out, counted to ten, and allowed himself the connect with the dirt. Tommy couldn't explain how his magic worked, the closest he'd ever gotten was that the earth around him was like an extra limb that if he focused hard enough on he could move. He knew how to wield the same way he knew how to move his fingers or walk; he just did.

Pulling on the earth in front of them, he raised a wall of solid dirt, blocking them from the man who'd begun to run towards them again. He heard a loud thud on the other side of the wall and snickered, the man must've run into it.

He ignored the shocked look on his friend's face and grabbed his wrist and willed the earth under them to rise up until they could step onto the roofs of houses next to them. When they had both stepped off the dirt, Tommy let the platform and the wall fall. The guy was laying on the ground unconscious. Both Tommy and Purpled laughed as they took off across the roofs, jumping from one to the next.

Eventually, they were able to settle near the forest and Purpled faced him, out of breath but grinning.

"You never said you were a wielder!" he exclaimed but he didn't sound upset.

"We've known each other two days, Purpled, I haven't had the time to!" He laughed.

"But I'm your best friend!"

"Yeah, and you've only been it for a day, give me a break! You're not spilling all your secrets to me," he pointed out. Purpled gave him a flat look.

“I told you my brother was a mercenary.” Okay, solid point.

“Well I, uh, no I’ve got nothing, you win. If now’s the moment we’re sharing all our deep, dark secrets then I should probably tell you I’m a prince,” Tommy told him straight-faced. Purpled burst out laughing. Okay, so not a great reaction but not the worst either.

“Yeah right, like a prince would be allowed to wander the city unaccompanied,” Purpled laughed harder and Tommy joined in, albeit half-heartedly. He shouldn’t be allowed but no one was there to stop him.

“Hey, you wanted to know my secrets! Anyway, I’ve got to go back to the castle now before my father, the king, gets mad at me for missing dinner,” he told Purpled who just fell on the ground laughing even harder.

Tommy turned and headed down the path back to the palace. He would be getting back a bit later than yesterday, but he would still be back in time for dinner if he ran.

He was less careful this time, running through the gate and crashing through the halls. He would just say he had been out riding and needed a quick change before dinner if anyone asked. No one would even think twice about the excuse. Yet no one stopped him, no one questioned where he’d been. His heart sank with the realization; no one was going to question where he’d been because no one realized that he’d been gone in the first place.

His absence in the palace had gone unnoticed once again.

As he took a short shower before dinner he allowed the tears to fall and be washed away by the warm water. Was he even a part of his family anymore? Did they even care about him? The sound of water covered the noise of his sobs. When he’d been too tired to cry anymore, he stood up straight and stepped out.

He found a pair of clean trousers and a silk shirt waiting for him. He could do this; he didn’t care what his family thought of him anyway (the small voice in the back of his head reminded him they didn’t think of him at all but he pushed it away and focused back on dressing).

The shower had been nice in a strange way, he no longer felt like drowning in sorrow and could probably just smile his way through dinner. As long as his brother left him alone.

Of course, the one day he wished his brothers wouldn't talk to him, they would.

"I went out to the gardens earlier and I didn't see you, where were you?" Techno had asked him. Tommy was startled, his brother had been looking for him, why?

"Oh, I was probably out riding or something," he mumbled.

"You should stay on the grounds in case we need you for something," his older brother told him. Tommy nearly laughed, as if they would *need* him.

"What did you need from me, then?" Tommy asked, irritation clear in his voice. He saw Tubbo shift uncomfortably out of the corner of his eye.

"Tubbo needed a sparring partner and since you're the closest thing we have to a walking training dummy I figured you'd be best," Techno grinned. It was a joke, or it was said like one, but Tommy didn't laugh.

"Well I'll make sure I'm available for your protégé to beat me up next time," he grinned sarcastically. Phil glanced at him sharply, it wasn't often Tommy got upset enough to show it. Usually, the boy would let insults go over his head or embrace them. Hell, the boy called himself annoying to almost every person he met.

"You shouldn't talk to your brothers like that," Phil scolded gently. Tommy just huffed and turned back towards his food. Phil shared a confused look with Techno.

"What's with the attitude?" Wilbur, ever the oblivious son, snarked.

“What’s with all the questions? Is it interrogate Tommy day?” the youngest prince growled.

Phil’s eye twitched.

“Tommy, watch your tone! Wilbur is your brother,” Phil scolded him again. *Why was he the only one getting in trouble?*

“He started it!” he whined.

“And I’m ending it! If you can’t be nice you can leave and come back when you’re in a better mood,” Phil said firmly. He had honestly expected his son to apologize or ignore him and turn back to his food, so when Tommy stood and stormed out of the room Phil stared at the door in shock.

The room was quiet, no member of the royal family could comprehend what had just happened.

“What’s his problem?” Wilbur broke the silence.

“Who knows,” Techno grunted and they all laughed uneasily. Phil made a note to check on his youngest later that night.

It wasn’t until hours after dinner, after his meetings were done and paperwork finished that he remembered to check up on his son. By the time he reached his son’s quarters and peered in, his youngest was asleep.

He didn’t want to wake the boy so he gently placed a kiss on the boy’s forehead followed by a whispered, “I love you.” He shut the doors quietly behind him, unaware of the changes soon to befall his family.

He also failed to notice the pile of simple, peasant clothes that rested where his son's normally royal attire laid. After all King Philza, for all his many talents, was never known to be observant.

Chapter End Notes

i may end up changing the chapter title later, i just thought it was a bit funny with how Tommy keeps going into the city expecting his family to notice his absence but they don't. anyway i hope you liked this chapter, a little bit of hurt no comfort but big things are in the works so keep an eye out :)

a whole new world, mostly

Chapter Summary

Tommy returns to the city with a brand new mindset. He meets plenty of new people and perhaps sees some old faces as well.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy had made his choice before he'd left for the city that morning. He would not be returning to the palace that evening, or any evening after. Last night's dinner was still fresh in his mind, the sting of their ignorance still left his heart aching.

He knew it was probably dramatic, running away from what most would imagine as the perfect life, but he was tired. Tired of being forgotten, tired of feeling unloved, and for the first time in seven years, he didn't have to be.

If his family was going to ignore him and act as if he were more stranger than blood, then he'd do the same.

It was a harder decision to make than he'd like to admit, a not insignificant part of him still longed to be loved by them. But he couldn't stay in an empty castle pretending to be a happy prince.

Besides, he'd already said a teary goodbye to Clara and Clementine before he'd left that morning so there was no turning back. He knew he would miss a lot about the palace but those two he'd miss more than anything else.

Smiling he tucked the address Clara had written down for him into his pocket. "She's a friend, if you need one," she'd told him. Clara was truly star-sent.

He wandered slowly through the streets, trying to savor this newfound feeling of freedom. When he finally reached Niki's stall, he bought only a loaf of bread and a few éclairs. He needed to save money now since he wouldn't exactly be able to return to the palace for his allowance. Niki smiled as she packed his basket.

"Your friend is waiting for you over there," she nodded in the direction of a small alleyway in between storefronts. "Try not to cause too much trouble!" she called at his retreating figure.

He turned around briefly to salute before slipping into the alley. It was darker than he realized and it took his eyes a moment to adjust. Just he began to make out the outline of someone, an arm was thrown across his chest, trapping both his arms, and a large hand was placed against his mouth.

He struggled in place for a moment then remembered the wise advice Technoblade had given him during that one week he'd tried to teach Tommy self-defense, "*If you can't get out of a hold just go dead.*" That had been an awful week.

He let his body relax and become dead weight. His attacker, clearly caught off guard, was unable to change his grip in time and Tommy fell right through his hands.

Tommy, forcing himself to calm down, turned quickly focusing on the ground near the attacker's feet and willed it to loosen. The attacker cried out in surprise as he began to sink. When he was a few inches deep, Tommy willed the ground to harden again, trapping the man in place.

The attacker didn't give up though, instead, he pulled a broad sword from his back and began trying to slash at Tommy. Tommy quickly stepped out of reach, finally taking a moment to catch his breath and take a proper look at his attacker.

The guy looked older than him but still young, probably close to Wilbur's age. He couldn't make out most of his face as it was covered by black cloth, but he could still make out ice blue eyes. His hair was a few shades lighter than the thick gold chains that decorated his neck. Something about him seemed almost familiar but he couldn't quite figure out why.

They stood, panting and watching each other, for a moment as chains dude finally stopped swinging his sword. Tommy decided now would be a great time for answers.

“It’s rude to just attack people, you know that right?” he asked, smiling as the man kept trying to yank his feet out of the ground.

“I’m going to kill you kid,” the guy growled started to wave his sword again.

He was too distracted watching the sword’s movement to notice a new figure slinking out of the shadows.

“Ignore him, he’s just a sore loser,” a voice came from over his shoulder. Purpled had emerged from the shadows, munching on an éclair.

Tommy jumped. “What the fuck man!” he cried, hitting his friend. “You know this manic?” he pointed towards the attacker, still stuck in the ground.

“Yeah, Tommy this is Punz,” he said as if it explained anything. His friend handed over his basket from Niki’s, he hadn’t even remembered dropping it.

“Cool, so why the fuck did your brother attack me?” he asked incredulously.

“He does it to all my friends,” Purpled shrugs. “You’re the only one who hasn’t ended up with a black eye.”

“Only because you didn’t tell me he was a wielder, you absolute fucking idiot,” Punz interrupted.

“Didn’t I? My bad, sorry,” Purpled did not sound very apologetic.

Punz moved to try to grab his brother but was once more stopped by the ground. He glared down at his feet then towards Tommy, “A little help here?”

“What’s the magic word?” Tommy teased.

“Fuck you, release me you heathen,” Punz screeched.

“Not quite but close enough,” and Tommy focused once more on the ground.

When Punz was finally freed from the ground he reached over and pulled Purpled closer and hit him on the back of his head.

“Fuck, ow! What was that for?” Purpled whined, rubbing the back of his head.

“For letting me go into a fight unprepared. You don’t do that, that’s how people get killed,” Punz lectured but Tommy wasn’t listening, he was bent over laughing at his friend as he got scolded.

Punz reached over and rapped the back of his head as well. *Shit, that hurt!*

“Fuck you bitch,” he screeched and rubbed the back of his head whilst glaring at his now laughing friend.

After taking a moment to collect themselves, the three boys walked out of the alleyway back into the daylight. Punz led them through the streets, out of the marketplace, and towards a part of town Tommy had never been to.

The brightly colored stalls and merchant voices faded as they walked farther and farther. Eventually, the buildings began to look more and more dilapidated, some with sunken roofs or shattered windowpanes. Tommy had to keep his eyes on the ground to avoid uneven pieces of roads.

Both Purpled and Punz seemed to be at ease, neither bothering a glance down. They were chatting about something, probably Punz's trip that he must've just come home from. Neither sensed his unease or if they had neither commented on it.

Eventually, Punz turned sharply to his right and ducked into a doorway. Purpled followed suit without missing a beat, most likely aware of their final destination. Tommy, however, did not know their final destination and stumbled trying to turn quickly. He could hear Purpled snickering from in front of him but he focused on the building in front of him.

It was an old storefront in about the same rundown condition as all the other ones on the street, but it seemed as if someone was at least trying to keep it clean. The windows weren't as grimy and the front porch looked swept. There was no shattered glass around, hell there was even a fresh coat of paint on the door.

He spared a glance to the window once more to read the letters painted on it: *Skephalo Potions & Precious Gems*. There was also a picture of a potions bottle and a cartoonish-looking diamond painted underneath.

Before he could stare too much at the storefront Purpled dragged him inside.

The interior was not what he'd been expecting. It was simultaneously larger than he imagined but smaller than it should be, cramped with all bookcases and cabinets. Plants, books, and rocks lay on nearly every shelf and windowsill in the room. There were a handful of chairs and a table off to one side, opposite the counter where Punz was standing ringing a bell obnoxiously.

"Gosh darn it, stop that! I'm coming, I'm coming," a voice yelled from the backroom.

And sure enough, a few moments later the door behind the counter swung open revealing a—cloaked figure? Tommy nearly bolted for the exit, what creep wears a hooded cloak indoors? He glanced towards Purpled who had moved to sit at the table, his friend didn't look perturbed in the slightest so he hesitated.

“Punz, you’re back! How was the trip?” the hooded figure asked.

“Same as always,” Punz shrugged. “Killed a few people, stole some stuff, took some me time.”

“Language!” Tommy startled at the shrill cry that came from the hooded man. Purpled just snickered at his reaction.

His movement seemed to catch the eye of the figure and they suddenly turned to face him.

For a moment Tommy was genuinely frightened, not that he’d admit it (he was a big man after all). The room went quiet and the air turned heavy but then the figure surprised Tommy. He reached a hand up and flicked down the hood, revealing a face as black as his cloak and two pointy horns.

“You brought a guest!” his white eyes flashed with something akin to excitement. “Hi! My name’s BadBoyHalo but you can just call me Bad or BBH.”

Tommy was struck speechless for a moment. He’d read about demons and fiends in his history lessons but he’d never seen one up close before. He suddenly became aware of his staring as the demon shifted his gaze towards Punz warily.

“Sorry, I’m Tommy. It’s nice to meet you Bad,” he quickly introduced himself.

“Great, now that everyone’s introduced can we get down to business,” Punz asked, impatience clear in his voice.

Punz pulled a few small bags from his coat and a larger one that was clipped to his waist and placed them on the counter. As BBH and Punz began to open them and sort through what looked like some stones and dried plants, Tommy moved to sit next to Purpled.

“I forgot to warn you about Bad’s *you know*—” he mimicked a set of horns on his forehead with his pointer fingers. “Thanks for being cool about it though, sometimes he can get kinda self-conscious about ‘em.”

Tommy just shrugged; he didn’t care Bad had horns, that seemed like a stupid thing to care about. “No problem, he seems like a pretty chill guy.”

“Yeah he is, until you curse in front of him then he gets all mad at you and yells until you’ve gone deaf in one ear. Sometimes it’s fun to rile him up though,” Purpled whispered conspiratorially.

“Really,” Tommy grinned. “So if I were to yell: YOU STUPID BITCH! I’d get in—”

“LANGUAGE!” Bad appeared next to them suddenly, as if he wasn’t just halfway across the room, and Tommy nearly fell out of his chair. “You can’t say those sorts of things in here muffin head! I’ll let it go this once because you’re new but no more, mister!” Bad scolded him.

Purpled was trying hard to conceal his own laughter but was doing a piss poor job at it. Tommy shot a glare at his friend before nodding solemnly to the demon. “Of course, BBH, I promise never to call someone stupid around here again.”

“Oh no that word is fine, well not fine but you can say stupid, it’s the other one you can’t say,” Bad explained, completely oblivious of Tommy’s smirk.

“You mean bitch?”

“Language!”

“Sorry, I won’t say bitch again,” Tommy promised stoically.

“LANGUAGE!” Bad yelled, the demon’s face was nearly red with anger which was impressive given his onyx complexion.

Purpled was on the ground laughing, even Punz seemed a bit amused by his antics.

“Bad, ignore the children, they don’t know any better,” Punz called out, ignoring the indignant squawks. “I want to get this done before dinner which I have a feeling will never happen if you start an argument with that one.”

“Fine,” Bad huffed and marched back over to the counter. Both of the older men focused back on the items across the counter. Judging by the pieces of conversation Tommy could overhear, Punz was selling some shit.

Purpled stood up abruptly and walked towards a display case. Tommy instinctively followed, not wanting to be alone in the strange shop. When Tommy took a look at the case he realized it held old scrolls. Some were so old the ink had started to fray but the lettering was clear.

Tommy recognized the language as old Empirian, the original language of the Antarctic before common. He knew a bit of it from lessons, not as much as Wilbur or Tubbo, but he was passable.

The scrolls were confusing though. They seemed to be talking about ancient forms of magic or maybe dragons, it was hard to understand. One looked like a recipe for a speed potion or an apple pie, he wasn’t too sure which one it was.

What he did recognize was the small symbols on a few of the scrolls, they were elemental. Those were probably wielding theories which sounded incredibly cool but also incredibly boring at the same time.

He turned to say something to Purpled only to be met with empty space. His friend had moved onto a different bookshelf, leaving him standing alone at the display case.

"I see you've found some of our more eclectic magical texts," a new voice suddenly cut through his thoughts.

He looked up sharply, surprised by the new person. They were dressed in blue and turquoise silks with a darker blue outer robe. His fingers and ears were covered with jewels, but it was the large blue diamond that hung on a thick silver chain. It seemed to almost glow and Tommy could feel the hair on the back of his neck rise as he stared.

"It's an aqua diamond," the stranger explained, unclasping the chain and setting it on the display case. "It's been inscribed with wielding runes and enchanted with loyalty. I use it to focus my own wielding."

Tommy stared, mouth agape at the rock. He'd heard of weapons being enchanted with wielding runes, like the knife Purpled had stolen during their first meeting, but this was something else entirely. He had so many questions: did it increase his power or just help him have better control over it? Would it work for any type of wielder or just aqua ones?

Before he got the chance to ask any of those though, he heard his name being called. Purpled and Punz were standing by the door, ready to leave. He huffed turning back to look at the necklace once more.

"Skeppy, leave the child alone," Bad scolded as he began placing some of the stuff Punz had just sold him into another display case.

The blue man, Skeppy, raised his arms in a gesture of innocence. "You got it, boss," he agreed and winked at the demon.

Just as Tommy had begun to turn away Skeppy caught his arm and handed him a scroll that had been in the case. Tommy began to refuse but the man just raised a finger to his lips and sauntered away.

He walked out of the store behind the brothers, looking over his newly acquired scroll. It was one of the scrolls written in old Emperian but the corner had been stamped with three triangles enclosed in a circle, a terra symbol.

He felt giddy at the thought of mystery. He would probably be able to translate the scroll but it would be hard without the help of the palace library. For a moment he thought about going back, it wasn't too late yet, but he shook off those thoughts, he'd made his choice. Perhaps there was a library somewhere in the city he could visit that could help.

"What's that?" Purpled asked having finally noticed the paper his friend was so focused on.

Tommy quickly rolled it back up and stuffed it into his bag. "Nothing, just a scroll that Skeppy dude gave me."

Punz and Purpled shared a look but both just shrugged and moved on. "We're gonna get lunch if you want to join?" Punz invited him.

"Sure, I've got nothing better to do," Tommy accepted.

He was a little disappointed they wouldn't be going down to the docks today, but he didn't want to let it show. Tommy found himself trailing behind the duo once more, weaving through crowded streets of workers and merchants also grabbing lunch. Strangers kept bumping into his shoulders as they passed him each time he fell a few steps behind his friends.

A particularly harsh shove from an impatient merchant caused him to lose Purpled and Punz in the crowds. He quickly tried to scan the crowd for the familiar blonde hair of his friends but came up empty. Tommy could feel himself begin to panic. He was completely alone in a part of the city he'd never been in, surrounded by strangers. His breathing stuttered as he took in his situation.

He felt a familiar tug beginning to rise in him as the stones beneath his feet started to tremble. Before he could fully lose control he felt a strong tug on his sleeve. He whipped around to find Purpled gripping his sleeve with a worried expression.

"You alright, Tommy?" his friend asked.

Tommy nodded, swallowing thickly, and allowed Purpled to lead him through the crowds. By the time they'd reached Punz, who looked slightly worried, Purpled had yet to let go of his sleeve. As Punz caught sight of them, his face broke into a relieved grin.

Neither brother brought up his disappearance as they continued walking but Puprled had yet to let go of his sleeve and he kept catching Punz looking over his shoulder at them. He warmed at the extra attention but didn't reject it.

After several winding streets and a few shortcuts through back alleys, Punz stopped in front of another rundown building. Unlike Skephalo's, this building made no attempts to appear kept. The shudders were hanging off the hinges or cracked, some windows missing any altogether. The windows themselves were cracked and covered in grime. The whole building seemed to sag in the middle.

He wrinkled his nose at the smell, a disgusting mixture of urine, vomit, and something he couldn't quite place. Judging by the yells of merriment and the painted beer glass on the sign, it was probably alcohol.

Why Punz and Purpled had taken him to a tavern alluded him but he followed a step behind as they entered.

Both the smell and the noise got worse once they were inside. It was busy, despite being barely midday. Patrons were laughing and swinging tankards filled with amber liquid. The place was crowded enough that there was always someone blocking your way.

Despite the crowds, neither of the brothers seemed to have any issues navigating the busy tavern. Swiftly ducking and sidestepping, making their way towards the tables near the back. Tommy, on the other hand, was less graceful, nearly tripping overextended feet and bumping into other patrons.

Eventually, the three of them made it to an empty spot at the tables and sat down. The moment they were seated a man was standing behind Punz. The guy's hair was covered by a blue bandana, but Tommy could see a few blonde pieces peaking out. He was wearing an apron and stood silently behind Punz.

After a moment Punz caught Tommy staring and looked behind him. He started, obviously having not seen or heard the man approach. Unlike Tommy, who hid his snickers behind a hand, Purpled laughed openly at his brother's misfortune.

"Nether, Calla, warn a guy!" Punz shouted.

Tommy let his gaze wander between the two men, it was clear they knew each other. Punz's shoulders relaxed and he was sporting an easy grin. Even Purpled was smiling at the new stranger.

The stranger, Calla, just shrugged and motioned towards Tommy with a questioning look. Tommy felt his confusion rise, *why wasn't he talking?*

Punz followed the motions and laughed, "Right, this is Tommy one of Purpled's friends," he introduced Tommy. Calla arched an eyebrow towards Purpled who squawked at some silent remark.

"I *do* have friends!" Purpled cried.

"Tommy, this is Callahan. He's a friend," Punz explained, ignoring his brother.

Tommy relaxed slightly, he wasn't used to meeting so many strangers in one day. "It's nice to meet you, Callahan," he said politely.

Callahan nodded in return, still not saying a word. Before had the chance to ask a probably rather rude question, Punz began speaking again.

"We'll just have our usual and another for Tommy," Punz ordered.

Callahan seemed to laugh, although it was more of a breathy noise than an actual laugh, and walked away.

When the man was out of eyesight, and hopefully earshot, Tommy turned to Purpled. “Why doesn’t he talk?” he asked.

Purpled shrugged, “Not sure, Punz said I’m not allowed to ask ‘cause it’s rude or something.”

“Yeah, because it *is* rude,” Punz broke in. “And it’s neither of your businesses. Calla is a great guy but he’s private, so don’t pester him.” He shot a glare towards Purpled. Tommy got the feeling he’d had this conversation with his brother a few times.

Tommy stopped himself from asking anything further. Punz was right, it was none of his business. Eventually, the conversation moved on and by the time Callahan returned with three steaming bowls and one mug Purpled was pestering Punz for more details about his trip.

The quiet man placed a bowl in front of each of them and the mug in front of Punz. In return, Punz handed him a few silver pieces which Callahan tucked into his apron and walked back in the direction of the bar.

Tommy took a glance into his bowl, unsure of what to expect, but was pleasantly surprised to find a rabbit stew. It smelled amazing. He hadn’t eaten much besides the éclairs he ate on the walk to Skephalo’s and that was ages ago by now.

Purpled seemed to share his hunger seeing as they both dug into their stews with unbridled ferocity. A small voice in the back of Tommy’s mind sung with glee knowing how upset his etiquette tutor would be if she could see him now.

Once they began to slow down Punz cleared his throat. “So, Tommy,” he began.

“So,” he replied, dragging out the o.

“Where are your parents?” Punz asked, his tone was casual but his gaze wouldn’t leave Tommy’s.

Fuck me, he thought, trying to recall everything he’s already told Purpled and prayed he wouldn’t contradict himself. “Uh, why?” he asked, trying to stall.

“Well, I can’t imagine your mother would be happy to find out you’re running with criminals and ruffians.”

“Yeah, well I can promise she doesn’t care about much anymore,” Tommy spat bitterly.

“Why is that?” Punz smirked.

“She’s dead.” His smirk fell and he could hear Purpled let out a strangled noise

“Stars, Punz!” Purpled groaned. “Stop it!”

“Sorry kid that’s rough,” Punz offered and Tommy waved off the pity.

“It’s fine, I’ve had a long time to grieve,” Tommy reassured his friend.

“Where are you staying?” Punz, ignoring his brother’s protests, continued his questioning.

Tommy hesitated. *Where was he staying?* He hadn’t gotten that far in his mental plan yet. Probably sensing his uncertainty, Purpled broke in again, “I was actually going to ask if he could stay with us.”

Two heads swung to face Purpled in shock. His friend just tucked back into his stew as if he hadn't just asked Tommy to move in.

"I don't think that's a good idea," Punz said slowly. Tommy watched Purpled's unbothered expression change into something less than happy.

"Why not?"

"How long have you known him, again?"

Purpled slouched in his seat. "Like a week," he grumbled.

"Three days is not a week," Punz pointed out, returning the middle finger Purpled flashed him.

Tommy could feel the weight of Clara's note in his pants. He sighed, he hadn't wanted to use the contact so soon. He wanted to put as much distance between his new life and the palace but he also didn't want to sleep in the street, or anywhere near Punz and his sword.

"I've got a friend," Tommy interrupted whatever staring contest Purpled and Punz were having.

"You have other friends?" Purpled asked, tone filled with shock.

Tommy reached out to whack his friend but Purpled ducked at the last minute. In space where his friend once was, he saw a flash of red, nearly orange, hair that caught his eye. The familiarity of it made him pause.

It couldn't be, he reassured himself, Fundy wouldn't leave the castle without Wilbur.

But then the red-head turned and Tommy's small flame of hope was snuffed. The man's sharp eyes and unsettling grin could only belong to one person. That was most definitely Fundy.

Fundy was Wilbur's personal servant/bodyguard. He'd joined the guard as an ordinary aqua wielder trainee but was quickly reassigned when they'd learned he'd already mastered his secondary. He'd quickly been given to Wilbur so they could grow and train together.

Tommy didn't know much about the red-head, he was young (barely a year older than Tommy) and he'd apparently been abandoned by his parents and he'd been raised by the streets. His mastery of his primary and secondary elements was done on his own and because of that, his wielding style was *unique* (aggressive).

For all intents and purposes, Fundy was feral and Wilbur loved that. The older boy reminded him of a fox, clever and quiet but always ready to catch you unaware. Tommy was right to be wary of the red-head, he had been on the opposite end of his water whip one too many times.

Wilbur would often say he was Fundy's father since he was the only one who could boss Fundy around.

Wherever Wilbur went, Fundy followed. So, if Fundy was here that meant—

"Steady and brave was King Adam, to all his people," a familiar voice echoed through the tavern.

Tommy cursed, apparently he wasn't the only lost little prince. Here, in a grimy tavern filled with the wrong sort of people, standing on the dilapidated stage, was the crown prince.

The tavern was busy, packed nearly, but Tommy knew it would only be a matter of time before either Wilbur or Fundy saw him. He cursed himself for not having changed his appearance at all.

He turned back to his companions, eyes darting towards the exits. He accidentally caught Punz's questioning gaze.

"I don't feel so good, is there somewhere quieter we can go," he asked in a desperate attempt at an escape.

"I mean if Punz is done with all is 'questioning' then we can go down to the docks," Purpled offered, pushing his empty bowl of stew towards the middle of the table and stood up. Tommy followed his lead, pushing his own half-filled bowl away and rising.

They turned to the older boy who stared at them for a moment before sighed and nodded. Purpled let out a whoop which had Tommy glancing over towards the stage hoping he was still unnoticed. Wilbur hadn't even so much as stuttered.

Without another word, Purpled and he slipped out of the busy tavern and back through the grimy streets. The cool air was a welcome relief from the sticky tavern air. Tommy could feel his lungs take in air once again.

Both boys stared at one another before breaking into grins as they dashed down the street in the direction of the sea.

Chapter End Notes

hope you guys liked this chapter, it's a little longer than normal :) I'll probably be slow updating because of classes but I'll try to keep it consistent! Anyways, if you have any questions or theories drop a comment and I'll try to respond :P

the beginning of something great

Chapter Summary

More Tommy and Purpled bonding plus some more Niki time

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The docks were farther away than they were used to and eventually both boys slowed their pace down to a walk. Each one needing to take a minute to catch their breath. Tommy used the extra time to think about what he'd seen inside the tavern.

Seeing Wilbur on that stage, singing as if the weight of the kingdom didn't rest on his head, caused a swell of mixed emotions inside Tommy.

On one hand, he was happy his brother could find a way to keep music alive in his life. He had looked free up on that stage, head free of a crown. It had been years since Tommy had seen him so at peace. He hadn't even realized how unhappy Wil had begun to seem until he'd seen him up on that stage, smiling for the first time in months.

On the other hand, it made Tommy upset. How many times had he'd asked Wilbur to sing for him to only be told he wasn't in the mood? He was shooed away and rejected just so Wilbur could play in some grimy bar instead. It left a bitter taste in his mouth. He knew he's drifted from his brothers in recent years but just how little did he know them now? Was Techno or Tubbo aware of Wilbur's escapades? He hated the reminder of how distant his family was.

On a third, metaphorical hand Tommy was proud of his brother. Once upon a time, Wil had been so shy with his music. It had taken quite a bit of Tommy's unrelenting adoration and never-ending compliments for Wilbur to sing in front of anyone. Now he was able to stand on a stage, in front of strangers, and perform. It felt bittersweet, knowing how far Wilbur was able to go without Tommy's help.

Despite the confusing mix of emotions, there was one emotion that stood out. Worry. He knew it was selfish but Tommy was worried. Now he knew he was not the only prince loose in the city streets. One prince, especially one with as little supervision as Tommy, could sneak away but *two*? Especially with one being the *crown prince*! It would only be a matter of time before Phil realized one of them was missing and send the guard. Then everything would be over, he'd have to go back to his lessons and his family who seemingly didn't care about his existence.

It did provide some comfort seeing how comfortable Wil seemed performing. Tommy would guess that it wasn't his first time in the Tavern. Perhaps Wilbur was doing what Tommy had done, sneaking in and out. Wilbur had looked as if he'd been doing singing there for years. If Phil hadn't noticed anything amiss yet, then maybe his secret was still safe.

As they approached the docks, Tommy shoved his thoughts aside. He started listening to his friend's chatter once more as the cobbled streets gave away to dirt then warped wood of the pier. The boys followed a familiar path to the end of one of the longer docks, weaving between discarded nets and crates full of fish. There they sat, feet slung over the side of the dock, with a basket of dwindling baked goods. Tommy sat quietly as Purpled talked about some of Punz's greatest adventures. They ate the bread from Niki's with a little jam Purpled had swiped on the way over and watched men and women as they ran back and forth between ships.

Purpled hadn't brought up Tommy's unusual silence, something he was immensely grateful for. So, as Purpled ran out of stories, silence filled the space between them. Eventually they settled into silence, a makeshift sort of peace between them, and watched the waves. Occasionally when a ship came onto the horizon one would point towards it and they'd stare for a moment but their attention quickly drifted.

Eventually, one ship caught both boys' eyes. The size was rather unimpressive, on the smaller side of average for a sloop, and the name etched on the side read, 'Nightmare'. *What kind of name is that?* But it wasn't the name that caught their attention, it was the colors of the ship's sails. Each was dyed a vibrant, almost obnoxious, shade of green.

Tommy nearly gagged at the sight.

To dye sails that large would have been expensive, and to die it such an abhorrent color must be considered a crime. Judging by the grimace on Purpled's face, he agreed.

After a moment the ship was docked and a wooden gangplank was lowered. In a flurry of movement, a group of five men emerged from the ship, each one wore doublets in different colors. He wondered if the coats were a sort of uniform. *A rather stupid looking uniform.*

The first to step off the ship wore a blue coat; he seemed bored as he looked around, flicking an obnoxious pair of sunglasses down. He had a bag slung off one shoulder, it was overflowing with paper. Tommy snorted as one paper got caught in the wind and the brunette chased after it.

The man who'd followed closely behind let out a loud laugh at his crewmate's misfortune. He wore an orange doublet that faded to a deep red at the bottom. His black hair was kept off his face by a white bandana. If he squinted, Tommy could just make out a rather nasty scar along the right side of his face. Tommy figured he might have been intimidated by the strange man if he wasn't currently bent over laughing.

The third man followed a step behind the first two. It was hard to make out his face with how far down his tricorner hat was pulled but Tommy could see a hint of blonde hair poking out from the back. Much to Tommy's horror, he wore a green coat the exact same shade as the sails. Tommy fought the urge to roll his eyes at the color, it was genuinely awful. The green man, as Tommy had dubbed him, reached out and snatched the flying piece of paper from midair. He offered it to the brunette with the ostentatious sunglasses but when the shorter had reached for it, the green man quickly yanked it back and held it above his head. Tommy could hear the curses and laughter from the other two from where he sat.

The last two men walked together closely, seemingly deep in a conversation. The one in a black doublet had a mottled orange and yellow and black scarf tied around the lower half of his face. While the last one wore a golden doublet, embroidered with emerald green. They didn't seem to be having a serious conversation, judging by their smiles, but there was a lot of hand gesturing involved. Neither looked up at their fellow crewmates' antics, too lost in their own world.

"Looks like Dream's back," Purpled muttered.

Tommy's brow furrowed as he tried to recall why the name felt so familiar. "Dream?"

“He’s another one of Punz’s friends,” Purpled explained. “He and his friends go out adventuring and shit all the time. Whenever Punz tags along he brings back the coolest shit.”

Tommy grinned, “That sounds fucking pog, man! When can I meet him?”

Purpled snorted, “I’m sure Punz’ll introduce you if you ask.”

“Why can’t we just go over there now?” he whined.

“Oh, of course, why hadn’t I thought of that? We’ll just walk up to a *Dream* and I’ll say ‘hey, you know my brother! Here, meet my stupid best friend who will probably bite you’”

“Really?”

“No.”

“Oh, fuck you!” Tommy shoved his friend who returned it with greater force.

“No, fuck *you!*”

Splash!

Both boys trudged through the streets in wet clothes, a trail of water following them. Both boys' hair hung limply and wet plastered to their foreheads but they wore matching grins.

They hadn't been walking long when Purpled spoke, "Who did you see in the tavern?" His voice was soft, so soft Tommy nearly hadn't heard him.

"What do you mean?"

"In the tavern, you saw someone that really freaked you out. I've never seen you get like that before," Purpled explained.

Tommy deliberated for a moment, he was tired of lying to his friend but he was afraid of losing his only friend. "Someone from my past, someone I hoped to never see again," he settled for a half-truth.

Purpled's mouth twisted into a frown, obviously unhappy with his answer. "You'd tell me if you were in trouble, right?"

"Yes," *as long as it didn't put you in danger.* Purpled nodded resolutely to himself and kept walking, seemingly satisfied once again.

They stopped by the vendors near the port and Purpled 'bought' them dinner (and by 'bought' he means Purpled snagged some fish off the grill whilst a vendor's back was turned). They munched on the leftover loaf from Niki's and grilled cod as they headed somewhere. Tommy wasn't too sure where they were going but Purpled seemed pretty confident, so Tommy just followed beside him. The longer they walked, the more familiar the streets felt.

When they finally stopped, they were back in front of the tavern, stiller wetter than what Tommy was comfortable with but a bit drier than when they'd left the docks. It was nearing sunset, so why had Purpled come back here? Were they meeting Punz again?

Purpled must have noticed his confusion because he asked, "You do know I live here right?"

Tommy stared at him, wide-eyed. No, he most certainly had not known that. “Oh, nice place you’ve got here,” he said, chuckling awkwardly. Hoping Purpled hadn’t seen the disgusted faces he’d made earlier that day.

“No, it’s not,” Purpled said, rolling his eyes. “But Callahan convinced the owner to give us a discount on the room above and it has a roof that doesn’t leak.”

Tommy stayed silent for a moment, unsure of how to respond. He’d never had to worry about something like leaking roofs. Purpled would probably think he was insane for running away from the palace. He was once more hit with the realization of how alone he was, how there was probably no one in the world who understood how he felt.

“Don’t worry, I’m not going to make you come in with me but the door’s open if you ever need it,” Purpled said, mistaking his silence for trepidation. *So, maybe he wasn’t completely alone.*

“Thanks, big man, but I should go find my friend now, it’ll be dark soon,” he said, patting his pocket where Clara’s note resided.

Purpled glanced towards the sun, hanging low in eastward sky, and nodded.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” Purpled called over his shoulder as he headed into the tavern.

Tommy watched him disappear completely before reaching into his pocket and pulling out the note.

He nearly gasped in horror at the waterlogged piece of paper. The ink was nearly illegible, having run from the exposure to saltwater. The name was nothing more than a black blur, completely unreadable, and Tommy cursed himself for not looking at it sooner.

The address was not much better but if he squinted it looked like it might read Miocha Bakery and Sweets.

He was so fucked.

Tommy sighed, there wasn't much left to do now except search for Miocha Bakery and Sweets.

Unsurprisingly, every person he'd asked had never heard of Miocha. The sun was setting, his feet were aching, and Tommy was very nearly ready to call it quits and head back to the palace when he saw it.

There, wedged between a dye shop and butcher, was 'Niachu's Bakery and Sweets'. Glancing between the painted letters and his note, Tommy decided it couldn't just be a coincidence.

And if it was the wrong place, maybe whoever was there would give him some free food.

Bracing himself, he opened up the front door. The smell of fresh bread and cinnamon immediately hit him and his mouth watered.

He looked around the shop for a moment, noticing no one was behind the counter. The tables along the back were empty and cleaned. The place looked deserted. For a moment he worried that the bakery was closed and he wouldn't be able to find anyone to help him. But he waved those worries away, *who would leave their door unlocked if they were closed?*

The kitchen doors opened as what appeared to be a small woman backed out of the kitchen, humming. Tommy turned towards the noise and found himself looking at a familiar figure.

"Niki?" he called out, unsure.

The woman jumped, nearly dropping a tray of what looked like cinnamon scones, and quickly turned towards Tommy.

“Tommy? What are you doing here?” She didn’t seem upset, just confused.

“Uh, Clara sent me?”

Recognition flicked through her eyes, “Oh, you’re the surprise she told me about,” she laughed. “Well, this is a big surprise. What can I do for you?”

Tommy shuffled awkwardly, he was unsure how to ask his next question. “Can I— well, I don’t actually—I need a place to, you know? Just for the night!” he tried to form an articulate question.

Niki laughed, “You can stay as long as you need kid, but I don’t take freeloaders, so you’ll have to help me in the kitchens, okay?”

“Yes! This is going to be awesome, Niki, you won’t regret this I promise,” he told her, bouncing with excitement. *She could teach him to make éclairs!*

“I have a feeling this will be a nightmare,” Niki sighed. “Let’s get you some dinner and I’ll show you where you’ll be sleeping.” She waved for him to follow her back through the kitchen doors.

They made their way to the back of the kitchen and through another door, this one leading them to a stairwell. The floor above the bakery was clearly Niki’s home. The stairs opened into the main living and kitchen area. The space was clean but felt lived in, so unlike most of the palace rooms. There were a few paintings hung up here and there and the whole room smelled like vanilla. What really caught his eye was the rather eclectic furniture combination.

Tommy snorted at the bright pink couch and matching floral armchair, but Niki’s glare silenced him.

“This is where you’ll be sleeping,” she motioned towards the large, pink monstrosity. She caught Tommy’s disgusted face and offered him the floor if he’d rather.

Reluctantly he settled into the couch and waited for Niki to grab him some pillows and blankets. When she returned with the bedding she also brought a plate of mashed potatoes and chicken.

He thanked her profusely and ate silently. When he was finished, he set the plate on the small table in front of him and allowed himself to take another moment to survey his new home. Behind the glow of the bright furniture, he saw a bookcase littered with a wide variety of books. Some of the titles were familiar but most of them looked to be recipe books.

As he moved on from the bookcase he spotted a small piano. Tommy could feel his fingers itch and he didn't hesitate to give in. Standing quietly, he made his way across the room to it.

He took a moment to brush his fingers along the keys before pressing down. The note played high and sharp but only slightly out of tune. Quickly he sat before the instrument and played another, and then another, and another until a familiar song was playing.

The world stopped for a moment, notes hanging in still air. The only thing that mattered was the melody that drifted free. It felt like hearing from an old friend in a very long time.

When he stopped and the world resumed, Niki was there in the armchair. She was smiling gently. "You play beautifully," she told him.

He smiled as he felt his cheeks flush but waved off the compliment. "It's been a while since I played, I'm probably no good."

"Modesty hardly suits you," she informed him. "You're welcome to play whenever you want. Stars know no one else will and she gets lonely."

"The piano will get lonely?" he asked a slight quirk to his lips.

“Of course, Beau is a very sensitive girl,” Niki laughed.

They were silent for a moment as Tommy stared at her. *She's gone mad, absolutely mad.*

“Don't look at me like that,” she scoffs. “Everyone names their instruments!”

For a moment he was lost memory. When Wilbur turned 10, a few months after the death of the Queen, he'd gotten a guitar from her. Apparently, she'd bought it months in advance and hidden it in her room. It was a simple wooden guitar with brass tuning pegs and the back had been carved with an ornate salmon (Wilbur's favorite animal at the time).

It was the last gift their mother ever gave and so all three boys treated it with the utmost reverence. Wilbur was the one to name her, of course, and he'd chosen Sally. When Tommy had told him it was silly to name an object Wilbur had calmly told him, *“Sometimes when we love something so much we give it a name because it means it's important. Sally is not just any guitar; she's our guitar.”*

“*Like how Techno names his swords?*” a small Tommy had asked.

“*Exactly,*” Wilbur had laughed. *“He wants everyone to know how important they are.”*

Tommy loved Sally, loved hearing Wil play her. It had been a long time since he'd seen Wil with her. It was sad, they used to be inseparable. *Like us*, a small voice in the back of his mind whispered. He ignored the voice and turned back towards the piano, banishing any thoughts of his brothers.

As if sensing his sadness Niki spoke up once more, “How did you learn how to play?” she asked.

“My mom taught me when I was a kid,” he smiled slightly. As he began a simple melody he could almost feel her warm hands over his, guiding them across the keys.

“Really, she sounds wonderful!” Niki said, relaxing into the chair again.

“She was,” he agreed. Judging by the silence that followed, Niki had understood his use of past tense. He didn’t dare turn around, he didn’t want to see the pity that would mar Niki’s usually kind face.

They sat for another moment, listening to the soft melodies Tommy played. When he finished, he removed his hands from the keys and settled the cover back over them. Sighing he turned to face Niki, who was watching him with a small smile.

“It’s getting late and you should get to bed. You have to wake up early to help me in the kitchen,” Niki told him, grinning at his annoyed groan. “If you need anything my bedroom’s at the end of the hall.” She pointed somewhere behind her as she began to get up.

Tommy nodded in understanding and made his way over to the couch. By the time he heard Niki’s door shut, he had settled into the cushions.

He tossed and turned for a while. The city was nosier than he was used to. The palace was always silent after midnight, the only people usually awake being the night guards and a handful of servants. The city however seemed to never sleep. There was a drunkard who started singing outside the window at one point and he could hear the people rustling in the streets below.

As he laid there, staring at the ceiling above him, he imagined the stars. He followed an imaginary pattern of stars over and over again.

Aquarius. Aries. Cygnus. Gemini. Lyra. Ursa Major and Minor.

Aquarius. Aries. Cygnus. Gemini. Lyra. Ursa Major and Minor.

Aquarius. Aries. Cygnus. Gemini. Lyra. Ursa Major and Minor.

Eventually, he felt his eyes droop and sleep invade his senses. That night, he dreamt of his mother's hands and nearly forgotten melodies.

Chapter End Notes

Hi so if you're curious here's dream's crew: dream (captain), George(navigator), sap (first mate), foolish (cook/repairs), ponk (medical). they'll be introduced more a little bit later don't worry ;) this chapter was mostly filler but also necessary set up so it's a little shorter and little boring but things are gonna get good real soon, I promise :) (again if you have any questions I'm happy to answer anything!)

little errand boy

Chapter Summary

Tommy makes lots of new friends, well he mostly just annoys a bunch of near strangers.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy's feet hurt by the time he left to go meet up with Purpled. True to her word, Niki had woken him before dawn to help in her kitchen. They kneaded bread for hours then Niki made him sweep the floors. Tommy had whined the entire time.

Eventually, Niki decided it was time to head to the market. They walked there together, both carrying baskets of fresh pastries. When they reached Niki's booth on the edge of the market, he helped her set up. Finally, after setting out more pastries than he'd ever care to count, Niki let him go but not before handing him a basket full of baked goods.

When he tried to pay she'd waved him off. "Consider it part of your pay," she had told him before promptly shooing him away.

He'd never tell her but a part of him was just happy to be able to help.

He'd shouted his thanks over a shoulder as he'd run off to find Purpled. When he did find his friend, he almost turned back.

The scene before him was rather familiar. There was Purpled, laughing as he was chased through the market square by, not one but *two*, angry shopkeepers. Tommy groaned; his friend couldn't stay out of trouble for two minutes. He almost preferred all the baking to whatever was about to happen.

He made eye contact with Purpled for a moment, who just shot him a wild grin. The petty part of him decided to let his friend run a little bit longer. When one of the shopkeepers was within arm's reach, Tommy decided to step in.

Taking a deep breath, he centered himself and tugged. A small piece of earth gave way beneath the closer man's foot, and he collapsed. His fellow shopkeeper didn't have time to stop and ended up tripping over his body. Both wriggled around in a pile of limbs trying to get up while Purpled ran over to him.

"Took you long enough," his friend huffed, still breathing heavily.

Tommy shrugged, "I figured you'd want to earn your muffin." He motioned towards the basket in his hand.

Purpled didn't waste a second, snatching the basket and rifling through it. He let out a little whoop as he pulled out a cinnamon swirl muffin, one Tommy had probably helped make that morning judging by the lopsided top.

"Get him!" Both boys jerked towards the angry cry. The two shopkeepers seemed to have untangled themselves at last and were even angrier than before.

"Shit!"

"Run!"

They both took off towards the edge of the market. They didn't stop running until the angry shouts had faded. When he finally calmed down enough to look around, Tommy found himself in another unknown part of the city. Purpled seemed to know where they were though, already further down the cobbled streets. Tommy had to quicken his pace to catch up.

After a few minutes of walking, Tommy had to ask, "Where are we going?"

“We’re going to see Sam, duh!” *Sam?* He was almost positive he’d never heard that name before. *Purpled needs to actually start explaining shit.*

“Who?”

“He’s a blacksmith, kind of,” Purpled told him, stepping around a few loose cobblestones.

“Kind of?” Tommy asked, suppressing the urge to kick his friend.

“Yeah, he works with like magic shit too, but he tries to keep it lowkey. He’s the one who made Skeppy’s diamond.” Tommy whistled. *Damn, this Sam must be talented then.*

It wasn’t much longer before Tommy began to hear the clanking of metal. The air seemed to get warmer the longer they walked and eventually they began to pass forges. Some were nothing more than stalls with an open fire but as they walked further down the road, they grew more and more impressive. The stalls eventually gave way to buildings and actual forges. One blacksmith they passed had three forges going with five men hammering at red-hot steel.

Tommy stared at the swords and armor in awe. Most were just normal iron or steel, but he did catch a few diamond ones. There was even one blacksmith who had what looked like wielding weapons laying on a rack. Purpled didn’t seem to be quite as amazed as he was but Tommy still caught his eyes lingering on a particularly bejeweled diamond axe.

Eventually, they stopped in front of a doorway. Tommy doubted he would have ever noticed it, let alone stopped there, if it wasn’t for Purpled. The door looked as if it hadn’t been painted in years and the building it was attached to didn’t look much better. The building wasn’t anything grand, maybe two stories tall but not very wide, wedged between two other buildings in the row. Tommy noticed that each of the windows had its curtains drawn.

When Purpled pushed the door open it didn’t squeak. At first, it took his eyes a moment to adjust to the darkness but once they had Tommy noticed was how much larger the inside

seemed. How impossibly large it was. He stepped back outside to stare at the building again then walked inside. Still impossible.

Purpled noticed his confusion and began laughing. “I told you he worked with magic.”

Tommy’s mind reeled. Could magic even do this? He didn’t know much about enchantments or potions but surely they couldn’t do *this*, whatever this was. Whatever it was, it seemed to defy nature.

“And here I thought I taught you lying and trickery was bad,” a new voice came from across the room. A large man, taller than Tommy and certainly thicker, wearing a long apron and heavy black gloves stood in the back doorway. Goggles on his head pushed back brown and green-streaked hair.

“But Punz taught me to never listen to idiots,” Purpled sniped back. “Besides I never lied, I just pointed out you work with magic!”

“But you still tried to trick him,” the man insisted but he didn’t seem genuinely upset. “I suppose there’s no saving a demon.”

“Hey, fuck you! I hate you, asshole!”

The man ignored Purpled’s spluttering and turned towards Tommy, smiling warmly. “I’m Sam and you must be Tommy, Punz was just telling me about you.”

Tommy hesitated for a moment, unsure of how to respond. “Punz talks a lot of shit, don’t listen to him.”

Sam laughed, it was deep and rumbling and Tommy found he quite liked the sound of it. “Quite the observant one. Don’t worry Punz had nothing bad to say.”

“Sure,” Tommy snickered. He was sure Punz must have had a lot to say about their meeting.

“Yeah, yeah enough chit-chat, ladies! Tommy needs picks,” Purpled cut in.

“Picks?” Tommy asked, confused at the sudden turn in the conversation.

Sam, on the other hand, seemed less confused. He huffed out a mixture of a sigh and a laugh. “Lock picks,” he explained. “Punz had me make some for Purpled a while ago.”

“They’re so cool! They’ve got enchantments on them!” Purpled crowed with delight. Sam laughed at the boy.

“That sounds so pog man! I want some,” he demanded, turning towards the man.

“Pog,” Sam mouthed towards Purpled who gave a small shrug in response. “Sure, I’d be happy to make you some *but* you’ve got to get me something in return.”

“What kind of side quest shit is this?” Tommy huffed but he didn’t refuse.

“If you get me Hannah’s old garden shears then you can get a set of lock picks, enchanted and everything,” Sam grinned.

“Fine,” Tommy snapped. “But this Hannah better not try to kill me!”

Sam shot him a mildly concerned gaze, “Are people usually trying to kill you?”

“You’d be surprised,” he sniffed.

“Okay, this is boring,” Purpled broke in again. “I’ll take him to Hannah’s and we’ll be back for the picks in a few hours!”

Without another word, Purpled dragged Tommy by the sleeve out of the blacksmiths.

“Ow,” Tommy complained as his friend yanked him harshly through the crowds.

“Don’t be a baby! Hannah’s shop is on like the other side of the city and if we don’t hurry, she’ll leave for lunch.”

“Who is this Hannah?” This was beginning to feel like a state dinner with all these introductions.

“Oh, Hannah’s the best! She runs this flower shop, it used to be her mom’s but then she died so now it’s just Hannah’s,” his friend told him, his tone only a bit too cheerful.

“I see and why are we stealing her shears?” he questioned.

“Why do we steal anything?” Purpled shot back. “Besides, we’re not stealing them. Sam probably wants to put efficiency or unbreaking on ‘em.”

Tommy stared at him for a moment. “Why would he do that?”

“Well, she’s gone through like three pairs this week and Sam’s just nice like that.” He shrugged.

“Sam gives out a lot of free shit then?”

“Pretty much, but only if he likes you,” they both laughed.

Purpled hadn't been lying when he said Hannah ran a flower shop. When the boys reached their destination, Tommy stared at the storefront in awe. Vines were hanging from the awning and plants in large hanging baskets hung up outside. From the small places he could see through the vines covering the glass, the inside was just as botanic.

As they entered the scent of all the flowers hit Tommy in the face. He took a moment to readjust his senses and glance around more clearly. The inside was more organized than the overflow of greenery that was out front.

On one wall were bundles of prearranged bouquets, bunches of lilies and roses woven with carnations and small white flowers Tommy had never seen before. Each one was a unique combination of flowers.

Towards the back there was a woman standing behind the counter, her back facing them. She held a watering can above her head and was watering some of the hanging plants. Tommy could see the roses woven into her braid. It reminded him of when he used to braid Techno's hair. He used to put little flowers in his braid just like that, and then Wilbur would complain about how short his hair was and how Tommy couldn't braid his hair until Tommy would stick a flower behind his ear. Then they'd all laugh and—

He pushed down the memories threatening to swallow him and cleared his throat. The woman behind the counter turned around quickly, spilling water as she did so. She didn't look that much older than either him or Purpled but she had a certainty to her that Tommy knew came with growing up too fast. He'd seen the same certainty in Wilbur when he put on his crown.

When she caught sight of Purpled, she gave them a small smile.

"What trouble are you causing today?" She asked, setting down the watering can and drying off her hands.

"Who me? Trouble? Never," Purpled raised a hand to his chest in mock offense. "It's Tommy here who's causing the trouble today."

The woman—*This must be Hannah*, Tommy thought himself—raised an eyebrow. “This pipsqueak?” Tommy scoffed, she acted as if she hadn’t had to look up when she’d given him a once over.

“I’m not a pipsqueak, bitch!” he argued.

Now it was Hannah’s turn to scoff. “Sure, as if I couldn’t count all your bones, you skinny pipsqueak.”

“I’m not skinny, I’m big and muscular!” he insisted.

“If you say so,” she shrugged. Tommy got the distinct impression he had not convinced her of his muscular stature, but he wasn’t given the opportunity to argue with her further. “So, what do you guys want?”

Right, Tommy had almost forgotten about Sam’s mission. “I need your garden scissors.”

“You mean my shears?”

“That’s what I said.”

“No, you said sc—”

“No, I think I know what I said!”

“Well, obviously you don’t!”

Purpled coughed loudly at the same time as he pushed a potted plant to the floor. They all watched the clay pot hit the ground and shatter. Dirt spilled everywhere as Purpled stared at them with a large grin. “Oops?”

“You shithead!” Hannah screeched.

“Listen, we’ll give you back the shears,” Purpled bargained now that he’d gotten the girl’s attention. “Sam just wants it so he can put some enchantments on it, you know how he gets.”

She huffed but went quiet, seemingly thinking about her options before she sighed. “Fine, but tell him I will be paying him back,” she told them, her voice filled with conviction.

“Yeah, sure, whatever you say just hand over the large, sharp thing.” Purpled held out his hand, palm open and waiting.

Hannah rolled her eyes but reached below the counter and pulled out a large pair of garden shears. They were nicked in a few places but overall seemed to be in good condition. Hannah hesitated for a moment before handing over the shears.

“Thanks!” Purpled cried already heading towards the door. “We’ll see you later!” he called over his shoulder.

“You better give those back soon!” she called after them.

Tommy followed after his friend, offering a quick goodbye as he left too. Once they were in the street, Purpled handed the shears over to him and took off. For a moment Tommy was startled by his friend’s swift departure but he took it as a challenge and chased after him.

They raced the entire way back to Sam’s, Purpled beating him by only a hair (which was only because he cheated and started before him but that didn’t stop his smug taunts). Sam was working on a bench in the front of the store when they entered.

He looked up as they entered and gave them a surprised look. “You’re already back?”

“Of course, we’re not pussies, big S!” Tommy laughed.

Sam gave an amused snort at the nickname. “Yeah, okay. Well, I didn’t expect you back so soon so your lockpicks aren’t ready yet—”

“Come on, man!” Tommy groaned.

“—But if you pick up my order from Skephalo’s then they should be ready by then.” Sam smiled at them sheepishly.

“Another fucking quest,” Tommy grumbled. He ignored the small part of him that liked feeling useful, the same part that liked helping Niki in the kitchens that morning.

This time it was Tommy dragging Purpled out the door, and away from the shiny daggers the boy had been eyeing.

He let Purpled take the lead again, he was still getting used to the unfamiliar streets after all. They followed a similar path as the day before on their journey to the magic shop. Soon enough they reached the shop, this time Tommy didn’t hesitate to enter.

“What’s up bitches?” he yelled as he entered with Purpled close behind.

Purpled snorted as a voice from the backroom sounded, “LANGUAGE!”

Badboyhalo emerged from the doorway glowering at them. Tommy knew he should probably be afraid of the fiend glaring at him, but he couldn’t stop cackling.

Bad seemed to realize this and sighed. “What do you want?”

“It’s nice to see you again too, Bad. We’ve been doing great, how are you?” Purpled asked sarcastically.

“Oh, I don’t remember asking but I’ve been wonderful, thanks,” Bad told them cheerfully with a fanged grin. “Now what do you want?”

“Sam asked us to pick up his order,” Tommy explained.

“He sent you two?” Bad asked, suspicion clear in his voice.

“Yep, he’s having us run all his errands in return for giving me a set of lock picks!” Tommy grinned.

Bad groaned, “Wonderful, I imagine nothing bad will ever come of that.”

“Of course not, I’m an angel!” Tommy agreed very seriously.

“If you’re an angel then Bad’s actually tall,” a voice joined them. Tommy turned to see Skeppy standing in the shop’s entrance. His hands were filled with baskets and his shoes were muddy, he probably had just come back from the market.

“I am tall!” the fiend cried. “I’m taller than you!”

The fact that Bad *was* tall, standing around seven feet, only made it funnier and it was clear this was not the first time they’d had this argument.

Skeppy looked between the boys and gave them a wink. The youngest shared a look then broke into grins.

“I don’t know, I think Skeppy’s right,” Purpled said, holding back a laugh.

“Yeah, I think he’s got at least an inch on you, BBH!” Tommy smirked. Skeppy most certainly did not have an inch on his friend.

“What—Are you blind? I’m clearly taller!” Bad shrieked. “You know what? Skeppy watch them, I’ll be back with Sam’s order. The faster you leave the better,” Bad narrowed his eyes at them before disappearing into the back room once more.

It was quiet for a moment before the three of them burst out into laughter. Skeppy even went as far as to wipe a tear from his eye.

“That was perfect,” Purpled wheezed between laughs.

“Did you see his face? He was all like ‘I am so taller than Skeppy’,” Skeppy pitched his voice up in a terrible imitation of the fiend. Both boys doubled over with laughter.

Eventually, they calmed down and Skeppy let them look through the gems. Tommy fiddled with a purple crystal, thumbing the jagged ridges, when Skeppy approached him.

“I see you’ve found an amethyst. They’re a rather common gem nowadays. Lots of explorers will come across these large geodes and fill their bags with what they think is a precious gemstone. They’re always disappointed to find out that their entire collection is worth maybe three gold,” Skeppy laughed. “Bad keeps lots in stock though because it’s supposed to help with stress and anxiety.”

Tommy looked at the crystal in his hands. He didn’t feel any less stressed or worried. It did look pretty though so he shrugged.

“Crystals aren’t for everyone, but they make nice gifts. Speaking of gifts have you read any of that scroll I gave you?”

Tommy thought back to the old, weathered scroll he’d gotten the previous day. It was laying on the small table in Niki’s living room where he’d left it, untouched. “Not yet, I need to brush up on my Empirian.”

“I’m surprised you know any Empirian, not many kids your age do.” Tommy could hear the slight suspicion in his voice. *Fuck.*

“My father insisted all my brothers and I learn it,” he explained, trying to be vague but still remain honest in his answers. “He liked to explore and knowing it’s helped him out of many sticky situations.”

“I see,” Skeppy relented, not sounding totally satisfied. “Well, there’s a library towards the middle of the city. If you ask for Karl, he’ll be able to point you in the right direction.”

Before Tommy could ask any questions, Bad rushed back in. The fiend was carrying a large parcel wrapped in brown paper and tied with twine. He handed it to Tommy but not before issuing a warning to give it to Sam *without* opening it. Then shooed the two boys out of his shop.

To Tommy’s surprise, Purpled didn’t make any attempts to open the package the entire way back. When he asked, Purpled had just told him, “Sometimes it’s best to do what Bad tells you, unless you want to be very uncomfortable for the next few days.”

Tommy had been much more careful with the parcel for the rest of the journey.

Tommy was able to let out a relieved sigh when they finally reached Sam’s shop and he could set down the package. Sadly, Sam was nowhere to be seen in the front room and when they tried the door in the back of the shop, they found it locked. After waiting for a moment, Purpled started banging loudly on the door.

On the third round of banging the door was thrown open and Sam's face, covered in black smudges, popped out. "Oh, hey guys! Give me a second and I'll be out," Sam smiled at them.

Purpled walked back towards Tommy and settled himself against the counter. A moment later Sam emerged, noticeably less soot-covered. He was still wearing his apron, but his goggles seemed to have been discarded and a strange-looking mask now hung around his neck.

"Sorry 'bout that, did you get my order?" the older man grinned at them.

Tommy motioned towards the package he'd dropped on the counter. "Can I have the lock picks now?"

Sam rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly, "So I might have gotten caught up with an order *but* if you grab me some lunch and see if Foolish has any news for me then I can guarantee they'll be done by then!"

"Seriously?" Tommy groaned.

Sam tossed him a small coin pouch, "Lunch's on me."

Purpled caught the bag before Tommy could. "Deal," he agreed without any hesitation.

And so, the two boys marched out of the forge for the third time that day.

"He couldn't have given us all his stupid errands in one go?" Tommy complained.

"He's paying for lunch, who cares?" Purpled argued. "Besides, it's not like we had anything better to do." They both laughed. Tommy couldn't even imagine what he'd be doing in the castle right now. Probably lessons.

“Where are we even going to find Foolish?” Tommy asked.

“Hmm, I’m not sure.” Purpled thought for a moment, “He’s a part of Dream’s crew so he’ll either be on the Nightmare or hanging out with Ponk at his place.”

“Ponk?” *Why was that name familiar?*

“He’s another one of Dream’s crew but he’s got a place in town where most of them bunk when they’re here,” Purpled explained.

Tommy briefly recalled Purpled pointing out an odd-looking building during his tour and dubbing it Ponk’s place.

“Right, docks first?”

“I’ll race ya!”

“Try it bitch, you’ll never beat Big Man Tommy!”

Purpled did indeed beat Big Man Tommy to the docks, but not by *much*. When they got there, they headed straight for the eyesore called the ‘Nightmare’. Tommy found his eyes hurt if he looked directly at its sails.

Purpled marched straight up the gangplank and onto the deck of the ship. “Oi, is Foolish here?” he called out.

The trapdoor leading below deck popped open, revealing the man in orange from yesterday. His eyes were wild, quickly scanning the deck, Tommy caught the gleam of a sword hovering just below the opening. He was ready for a fight.

When the man's eyes settled on him and Purpled he relaxed. "Jeez, Purpled, announce yourself next time!"

"Whatever, Sapnap, is Foolish here?" Purpled repeated.

Sapnap ignored the boy's question, instead turning his attention towards Tommy. "And who are you?"

"I'm Tommy, innit," he shrugged. "We just wanna talk to Foolish."

"Well, Tommy Innit, Foolish and Ponk just left for the day but if you hurry you might be able to catch up to them," Sapnap told them, crossing his arms.

"Thanks," Purpled cheered as he grabbed the back of Tommy's shirt and started to drag him off the ship.

"Oh and Purpled!" Sapnap called out. "Come on this ship without permission again and I'll tell Punz what happened to his favorite sword!"

Purpled swore under his breath but didn't yell anything back. Tommy laughed and nudged his friend's shoulder as they stepped off the boat. He'd never seen Purpled so thoroughly told off.

"I thought you weren't close with Dream's crew," he kept his voice even but Purpled understood what he was asking.

"I'm not," Purpled scoffed. "Punz is really good friends with 'em though so I've hung out with them by association. Sapnap just happened to be hanging around when one of Punz's swords disappeared and now he likes to use it as blackmail. He's an asshole."

His friend glared at the ship behind them, probably wishing a painful demise for a certain crew member. “Anyway,” he clapped his hands. “We’ll just have to Pонк’s place now, I guess.”

The two boys joked the entire way through the main square, nudging and pushing each other. A few times Tommy had pushed Purpled into a stranger only for him to return with something new. He’d hand off the treasures to Tommy so he could keep his fingers free.

By the time they reached Pонк’s Tommy was holding a handful of coins, a silver pocket watch, two scraps of leather, and a *hairclip*? He had no idea how his friend even managed the last one.

As it would seem, he did recall Pонк’s house from Purpled’s tour. It was a nice house overall, three stories right on the edge of the main square. But the doors and windows were all painted a bright orange color. Which when paired with the brick exterior, made for an interesting combination.

Purpled took the brass door knocker in his hand and loudly rapped on the door a few times. When there was no response, he knocked again. As they stood outside the door waiting for someone to answer, Tommy noticed the looks people were throwing at them.

He realized how out of place the two of them must have looked. Them, dressed in threadbare shirts and Purpled for sure had dirt on his cheek (Tommy could only begin to imagine what he looked like), compared to the well-dressed ladies and men walking around. Tommy had so seamlessly blended into Purpled’s life, into thievery and degeneracy, that he hadn’t even realized how far he’d fallen.

Never before in his entire life had he felt so out of place and judged. He felt dirty. If only these people knew who he really was, then they’d be quick to change their gaze. He glared at one woman who stared at them for a second too long as she passed. He was about to yell out some rather rude obscenities when the door swung open.

Tommy remembered the man in the doorway from the day before. He wore the same mottled mask as he had then, still hiding his face even in the comfort of his own home. He stared at them for a moment before he sighed and opened the door wider, letting them in without a word.

The inside of the house was barer than Tommy had expected. There was a table in the entrance covered with flowers and trinkets and a coat rack with quite a few colorful coats but no pictures or paintings hung on the wall. Tommy made sure to slip off his shoes before stepping onto the oriental rug, Purpled hadn't bothered.

"At least take off your shoes," the masked man called out as Purpled marched down the hall.

Without pausing, Purpled took off one shoe only to throw it back towards the man then took another step and did the same with his other. "Better?" he called back.

"Much!" the man rolled his eyes. "Kids," he muttered.

Tommy glanced between the man and Purpled before scurrying after his friend. He found himself in a kitchen, Purpled already sitting at the table. A moment later the door on the opposite side of the room entered and a blonde man entered.

"Hey, Purpled! What can I do for you?" he asked, seemingly unperturbed by their sudden appearance.

"Foolish, Sam sent us," Purpled greeted. "This is Tommy, he's the one who made Punz eat shit."

"Oh wow, nice to meet you, Tommy! I'm Foolish, big fan of your work" he introduced himself.

"Yeah, I'm pretty awesome," Tommy agreed, grinning as the older man laughed. "Anyway, Foolish, my friend, Sam wants to know if you've got any news for him."

Foolish wore a thoughtful expression for a moment before brightening, "Oh yeah, tell him I found some channeling stones he can have and that Ponk wouldn't stop whining about him

the entire trip and we're gonna get dinner together tomorrow if he wants to come!" Foolish rambled.

"So channeling stones, Ponk, and dinner. That's it?" Tommy fought back his annoyance, *this was a waste of time*.

"One last thing, tell him that there's a league match tonight and he should come!" Foolish smiled. "You two can come too if you want."

"What's a league match?" Tommy asked looking towards Purpled for an answer.

Foolish let out a gasp, "You don't know about league wielding?" Tommy shook his head.

"Sometimes I wonder if you were created by magic just yesterday with just how unaware you are," Purpled groaned.

"Hey!" Tommy whined. "But seriously, what's league wielding?"

"I'll explain it to you later but it's basically just a bunch of wielders trying to kill each as a game," Purpled waved off his worried expression. "It's a pretty popular sport."

The masked man from earlier stumbled into the kitchen. "The Dream Team's coming over in a few so you guys need to clear out," he said pointing towards Purpled and Tommy. *Rude*.

"Oh, okay! Thanks, Ponk! Tell Sam if he wants any of the juicy stuff he's got to come see us in person," Foolish grinned. *He's a rather smiley one*.

Tommy nodded as he and Purpled rose from the table. He slipped his shoes back on while waiting for his friend to do the same. Apparently, someone had hidden them in a closet and so it took Purpled a minute to find them. Eventually, they were able to leave with a quick goodbye to the two men.

Tommy spent the entirety of the walk back to Sam's pestering Purpled about league wielding. Only stopping when they got lunch from one of the vendors in the market.

As it would turn out, league wielding was not as simple as Purpled made it sound. But Purpled wasn't lying when he'd said it was just a game of violent wielding.

Purpled explained that the aim of the game was to knock each player on the opposing team outside the red boundary square using wielding. Each team was given a half of the square and you weren't allowed to cross into the other half unless you wanted a penalty. The only real rules were 1. a wielder could only use their primary to knock out any other wielder on the opposing team, 2. you could only wield what was inside the arena, and 3. wielders were encouraged to not maim or kill any other opponents (but according to Purpled "sometimes accidents happened").

If you broke any of the rules you got a penalty, three penalties and a player was automatically knocked out. Too many penal knockouts meant you got benched and couldn't play in any matches for the rest of the season.

Purpled pointed out the large domed building in the distance. It was the main league facility in the area. Its main arena had just finished renovations. The ground of it was now mostly packed fresh earth except for the metal grate towards the back that covered a pit of fire beneath the ground and in each of the corners was a large basin of water. Since flame wielders weren't allowed to create any fire, they could pull from the fire already there. Apparently, it had been enchanted so it glowed blue, Purpled called it soul fire, and it didn't burn as hot so it was less likely to leave any permanent damage.

There were three different types of league matches: multi, complimentary, and singles.

The main arena was used for the multi matches, where teams of four (one of each type of wielder) fought each other. Those seemed the most fun. Tommy tried to imagine a flame wielder fighting against a terra. It sounded so cool.

There were also smaller arenas that only accommodated a few of the elements for single or complementary matches. Different ones were made specifically for certain match pairings.

Single matches referred to matches with just two wielders pitted against each. It could be any combination of wielders fighting, like two aqua wielders or a terra and flame. Tommy had seen his brothers fight during wielding practice all the time and he wondered how similar it might be.

Complimentary matches were a two vs two style, with each team being made of complimentary wielders. Unlike the single matches, a team could only go against an opposite team. So, flame and aqua teams had to fight terra and wind ones. For some reason, they were Purpled's favorite kind of match.

"So yeah, in complimentary matches only flame and aqua wielders can team whilst wind and terra have to team. Then that team can only fight the other kind. Which means they have all fight really dirty—" Purpled explained as they finally reached Sam's forge.

"Why couldn't a flame and aqua team fight another flame and aqua team?" Tommy asked, confused.

Purpled shrugged, "Dunno, boring I guess." Purpled said as he pushed open the door.

"Hmm, weird," Tommy mused as they stepped into the hot room.

Sam was waiting for them this time. He stood near the counter holding a small cloth bundle. He grinned when he saw the two boys approach. Tommy wondered briefly if everyone in this city was kind, so far everyone he'd met had been kind. Well, except for the snooty rich people in the square (he ignored the fact that he was technically *one* of those snooty rich people).

When they were close enough, Purpled tossed him the bag of bread and cooked meat they'd picked up for lunch. The man caught it with ease and grunted in approval at the contents. He started to unpack the lunch as he began to speak.

"What did Foolish have to say?" he asked as he bit into a piece of steak.

“Said if you want the real juicy stuff you’ve got to go yourself and stop sending kids to do your dirty work,” Tommy grumbled.

“Fair enough,” Sam laughed.

“He also said he’s got some channeling stones for you and that he and Ponk are going out to dinner if you wanted to join them,” Purpled chimed in.

“Hmm,” Sam stared off into the distance as he thought for a moment. “I might be able to make the time. Anything else?”

“He said there’s a league match tonight,” Tommy told him. “Which sounds cool as fuck and Purpled and I are going.”

“We are?”

“Shut up, bitch.”

“Fuck off, dickhead!”

“That’s so not poggers!”

“You’re not fucking poggers!”

Tommy let out a loud gasp. “How dare you!” He lunged towards his friend, only to be stopped by Sam’s hands yanking him back.

“Yeah, I’ll go. Wouldn’t want to miss out on a multi-match,” Sam laughed at Tommy trying to wiggle out of his grip.

“Let me go you bitch!” Tommy cried and wiggled even harder as his friend stuck out his tongue.

“If you say so,” Sam released Tommy who’d been too busy trying to get break free and wasn’t aware of how much momentum he’d garnered. When released he fell immediately.

Tommy yelped as he hit the floor with a loud thump. “Ooow!”

Purpled collapsed next to him, near tears and out of breath. “You—your face—priceless!” he wheezed.

“Alright you two, why don’t you have Punz show you how to use these,” Sam handed Tommy the bundle of cloth. He helped both boys off the ground.

Tommy unraveled the fabric to reveal a beautiful set of lock picks. “Fuck yes,” he breathed, staring at the thin pieces of iron reverently.

“They’ve got unbreaking, so you won’t have to worry about them snapping on you any time soon,” Sam ruffled his hair.

“Thank you, thank you!” Tommy chanted.

“I’m going to regret this aren’t I?” Sam asked turning towards Purpled.

“Without a doubt,” Purpled confirmed. Sam let out a deep sigh.

“Get out of here,” Sam shooed the boys out of his shop.

Tommy couldn’t wait to see Punz again. He was going to learn so many wonderful life skills! Who needs lessons? Not Big Man Tommy, that’s for sure.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry this took longer than I thought but it is nearly 6k words. this will probably be the longest one yet, i really just needed a way to introduce some of these characters and i felt like didcating an entire chapter to them would take too long. Also yes league wielding is just pro=bending but not as complex lol. Hope you enjoyed, as always if you have questions feel free to ask :) (ps i love seeing all your sweet comments, it's crazy how nice you guys are)

a whole new life

Chapter Summary

Tommy is settling into his new life in the city well but how long will it take before things begin to go wrong (spoiler alert: not long)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

As it would seem, learning how to pick locks was not as easy as Tommy had originally thought. It had taken him an entire week to even pick his first lock. It was frustrating trying to move the tools around and fumble with the tumblers just for nothing to happen. Then his arm would start to cramp from being in such a weird position for so long and it was just not fun. Yet all that unpleasantness was so worth it to hear that first lock click into place.

“Nice,” Punz had congratulated him. “You’re already better than Purpled was when he started.”

“Fuck off!”

Punz had spent the next several days explaining each of the picks and how to use them. He showed Tommy which pick was for locks with multiple pins and which ones to use on the tumblers. At first, all the strange terms had overwhelmed but Punz was a good teacher. He’d demonstrated different techniques as he explained them and never laughed at any of Tommy’s questions. Eventually things just kind of *clicked* for Tommy.

He’d spent the first few days away from the palace anxious, worrying when the guards would come and knock down Niki’s door or drag him from Purpled’s home. Eventually, a week had passed since his absence and there was still no mention of a lost prince. Slowly, he allowed himself to relax a bit and found his days began to fall into a routine of sorts.

He’d first wake up early to help Niki in the kitchens, baking all sorts of desserts for her stall. Then help her carry the pastries to the market before finding Purpled and wreaking havoc

until he met up with Punz for lock picking lessons. Then Purpled would walk him back to Niki's for dinner in the evenings. After dinner, Niki would teach him a new recipe, or they'd sit and read together. Eventually, he'd fall asleep only to wake up the next morning and do it all over again.

He'd never been this content with his life before. He wished it could last forever.

One day, well into his lessons, Punz decided it was time for him to test his new skills in the real world. So, he spent the one particularly chilly afternoon walking around the city with Punz and picking locks. Purpled had ditched them a few hours in to 'find someone who wasn't going to bully him. *Good luck with that.*

He wouldn't lie, walking around alone with Punz was a bit awkward at first but soon enough they fell into a rhythm of sorts. Punz would point out a lock for Tommy and he would go and try to pick it. When he was successful, he'd walk back to Punz who would tell him how long it took.

After about ten locks, Tommy started to get the hang of it. He could pick just about any regular door lock in under a minute. Some were harder than others and others were just more tedious, especially the padlocks. He was always sure to keep an eye out for guards or well-meaning citizens but most of the doors Punz would pick were tucked away from prying eyes.

"Damn kid, I don't know if I should be impressed or mourning my privacy." Punz congratulated him as he returned from another lock humming. *See, even Punz was proud.*

"I know, I know, you should be bowing down to my awesomeness," Tommy joked but he couldn't hide the genuine smile on his face.

Tommy liked being good at something, and he especially liked getting compliments from Punz. He tried to ignore how similar Punz's voice sounded to Wilbur's when he gave compliments. He pushed down the memories of crude drawings and clumsy piano notes. He didn't need his family's approval anymore. He was free to do as he pleased now, and he was pleased to pick locks.

“That one,” Punz ordered as he pointed towards a set of old weathered doors chained together and locked with a heavy padlock. Both the lock and the chain were so rusted Tommy could barely see where one ended and the other began. Still, he could see a keyhole which meant he could pick it.

Punz lingered at a shop window as Tommy crept towards the door. After he settled in front of it, he took a glance around to make sure no one was watching. When he deemed it clear, he set to work.

First, he jammed a small, hooked pick into the lock then grabbed the long, thin piece of iron and jammed it right below the first pick. Gently, he applied pressure with the iron piece and began to twist. He could feel two of the pins pop into place but the last one was being stubborn.

He twisted the picks back and forth a few times before finally hearing the last pin slide into place. The shackle must have been rusted shut though because it didn’t pop open. Tommy tugged a bit at the rusted top, but it refused to give. Letting out an irritated huff he pulled harder. It still wouldn’t budge.

“Oi, what are you doing?” Tommy stiffened at the loud voice. He glanced over his shoulder to see a royal guard walking towards him. *Fuck!* He glanced around for Punz but the asshole was gone.

He hesitated for a moment, torn between his desire to yank the lock, and not wanting to get caught. There was no way the shackle would give, he knew it. Quickly he pocketed his tools, fumbling as he did so, then bolted.

“Stop right there!” He heard the man shout as he gave chase. Tommy was not getting caught, not today.

He kept running, trying to remember the streets around him. He was a little more familiar with these streets after just having walked them for hours with Punz. As he turned down a narrow back alley he realized he’d never make it to any of the busier roads so he wouldn’t be able to lose the guard in a crowd. And judging by the sound of footsteps growing ever closer, he wouldn’t be able to outrun them either. He was so fucked. *Damn Punz.*

Suddenly he remembered a small alcove he and Purpled passed on the way to the market. If his mental map was correct (*please let it be*) it should be on the road that ran perpendicular to this one. He could see the mouth of the street coming closer and closer so he pushed himself a little bit harder.

He took the corner quickly, whipping around it, and scanned the walls. To his great relief, the alcove was only a few feet away. He could hear the guard's cursing getting rapidly closer, so he ducked into the small space. He pressed himself as far back as he could fit and prayed that he wouldn't be seen.

He breathed a sigh of relief as the guard ran past his hiding spot without a second glance. He waited a few more minutes before he left his hiding spot. He was going to kill Punz when he found him again.

"Huh, you didn't get caught," Punz's voice came from behind him.

Tommy jumped, speak of the bastard. The man was relaxed against a wall, near where Tommy had just emerged from. Tommy turned to fully face the man; his face twisted with rage.

"Fuck you," Tommy scowled. "You left me!"

"I was teaching you a very valuable lesson," Punz corrected with a smug smirk.

"Oh, please you must tell me what great lesson you were trying to teach me, O Wise One," Tommy mocked. "Was it how to haul ass?"

Punz chuckled, "Funny, kid, but no. If you're going to stick with us, you need to learn when to cut your losses."

Tommy was fuming. “And me getting chased through the city was integral to that lesson?”

“Well, if you’d given up earlier you would have had a much larger head start,” Punz shrugged.

“Yeah, but I almost had it,” Tommy growled.

“My point exactly. You let your pride and attachment get in the way of logic. It was a rusty lock that led nowhere and to nothing, but you wanted to prove you could get it. You need to learn how to judge if something’s worth fighting for,” Punz’s tone was harsh but he kept his expression neutral. “Besides, you weren’t going to get caught. I’ve seen you run, you’re pretty fast for a rich kid.”

The flickering anger in him was quickly snuffed out by a wave of fear. *What did Punz know?* “Wha—I’m not—I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

“Kid, you’re not exactly subtle. You talk like a noble, despite all the swearing, and you’re probably the cleanest dressed orphan I’ve ever met. Not to mention you’re completely unaware of very normal things,” Punz told him, his tone flat.

“I—I do not!” Tommy spluttered.

Punz raised an eyebrow. “You had no idea what league wielding was.”

“I’m just not very into sports,” Tommy sniffed.

“You asked me what beet soup was.”

“Meh, meh, meh, my name is Punz and I think I’m a detective,” Tommy imitated the older man.

“I’m just pointing out the obvious,” Punz shrugged. “I don’t care where you came from, okay? As long as you don’t hurt Purpled, then I don’t give a damn about where you came from.”

Punz had taken a few steps forward as he was speaking and now stood barely a breath away. Despite being a few inches short than Tommy, Punz still made him tremble a bit. He gave the man a tight nod. He’d never hurt his friend, *never*.

“Does Purpled know?” Tommy asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

“I haven’t said anything,” Punz shrugged. “But you should tell him, it’ll only hurt the longer you keep it from him.”

“I know but what if he hates me?”

“That kid couldn’t hate you even if you killed his cat,” Punz laughed

“Purpled has a cat?”

“What? No, it’s an expression,” Punz sighed.

“Oh right, got it!” Tommy flashed him a thumbs up.

Punz shook his head as he took a step back. “Good, glad we had this chat. Speaking of Purpled, I told him we’d meet him by the arena so we should start heading that way now.”

The man didn’t wait for Tommy’s response, instead, he turned on his heel and started walking down the street. Tommy hurried to catch up, his anger and anxiety falling away. He was going to see his first league match! Punz hadn’t let them go to the last one, something about

having some business to deal with and how they weren't allowed to go without him. This time around though Punz had agreed to take them.

Purpled had spent an hour that morning listing his favorite wielding moments in very vivid detail. It was safe to say Tommy was really looking forward to tonight's matches. He spent the entire walk to the arena imagining different moves and possible outcomes.

In his mind he pictured a terra wielder shooting slates of packed earth trying to knock out his counterpart. Or a flame wielder directed a column of flame towards their opponents, only for a wind wielder to conjure a tornado and redirect the flames back. Tommy grinned at the thought, *a fucking flaming tornado was sick*.

The closer he and Punz got to the arena, the more crowded the streets became. The air was heavy with the excitement of the masses, all moving towards the large doors of the stadium. Tommy had never seen this many people before in his entire life, there were thousands! And they were all here to watch a bunch of wielders fight. He could feel the unadulterated glee running through his veins.

He began to tug Punz faster, weaving in and out of the crowds. The mercenary let himself be pulled and just laughed at the boy's excitement. When they finally slid into the large stadium Tommy paused. He felt almost home with the large, vaulted ceilings and spacious hallways but the familiarity was wiped away by the bright orange and yellow decorations.

Along the halls were posters of different people, fighters he assumed, each one posed wielding a different element. Yellow banners advertising anything from clothing shops to an upcoming production hung from the archways. There were entrances with ushers taking people's tickets on the wall opposite to him labeled 'Main Arena' and he could see a sign at the end of the hall painted with arrows that pointed to other arenas.

"The single and comp events are usually downstairs," Punz told him pointing towards the signs. "There's a bunch of smaller arenas down there fitted for special matches."

Tommy had remembered Purpled mentioning something about that. "What's upstairs then?" he asked.

“You’ll see,” Punz grinned, his eyes glinting mischievously

“What’ll we see,” Purpled’s voice startled him. He was carrying a roasted rabbit leg and a plate of some other food Tommy didn’t recognize. His friend had ditched his normal purple coat and cloak and was now dressed head to toe in a very familiar, obnoxious shade of green.

“Tommy was asking about what’s upstairs,” Punz explained.

“Well, we shouldn’t keep him waiting!” Purpled smirked.

“What’s up with the green?” Tommy asked, poking at his friend’s shirt.

Purpled just laughed. “I’m supporting my favorite wielding team, DT!” he explained.

“Oh, well it’s ugly and I can’t believe I have to be seen with you,” Tommy grumbled. Purpled laughed harder, then he unclasped his neon cloak and threw it over Tommy’s shoulders. Ignoring all of Tommy’s angry mutterings about the awful color, he refastened it snugly. After taking a moment to appreciate his work, Purpled turned back towards Punz.

“Let’s go!”

The two brothers led him up the stairs quickly. The second floor looked nearly identical to the first except there were paintings instead of posters and the floor was covered by plush rugs. The entrances were guarded too, and Tommy realized none of them had tickets. He wondered for a moment how they were going to get in, would they have to sneak past the guards? Surely that wouldn’t end well.

His worry was wasted though because they didn’t stop before any of the entrances. The brothers kept moving, barely glancing at the guards as they walked past. Tommy did his best to imitate their nonchalance while hiding his confusion. They followed the hallway as it wrapped around a corner only to come face to face with a dead end. Neither Purpled nor Punz seemed deterred though.

Punz began fiddling with one of the larger paintings. After a moment the painting swung out from the wall, revealing a small *door*? Well, it was less of a door and more of a small, rectangular piece of wood with a lock that rested a few feet off the ground. Punz turned back to them, grinning wildly.

“How about one more lock?” Punz asked him.

“As long as it doesn’t end with another chase scene,” Tommy shrugged and set to work, ignoring Purpled’s confused noises.

This lock was much easier than the rusted one from earlier. It only took a little bit of fussing for the pins to fall into place and the lock to click open. He tugged the door open but before he could see what was beyond Punz pulled him back.

“Good work, kid,” he gave the younger a sharp smile and hopped through the opening.

Purpled clapped his shoulder as he too pulled himself through the opening. For a moment Tommy was left alone outside the doorway alone, a bit unsure of what to do next. Suddenly, Purpled’s hand shot out and grabbed his sweatshirt, and he was yanked through the hole. Fitting through the opening was awkward, he was a bit too big for the door and it was just high enough that his shoulders ended up going through first.

He landed headfirst on the other side. Groaning he dusted himself off and looked around. Once his eyes adjusted to the sudden darkness, he realized he was looking at a flight of wooden stairs. He found himself in a sort of storage closet. Broken mops littered the floor and cobwebs had settled into the corners, but the stairs looked well-loved.

No one decided to explain what was happening. Punz had simply just continued up the stairs and Purpled was busy closing the painting behind them. When he finished he moved to follow his brother. As he passed Tommy, he gave him a quick nudge towards the stairs. Shaking off his confusion, Tommy followed the other two up the stairs to another door. Unlike the painting door, this one was unlocked.

As Punz swung it open Tommy was hit with the roar of a crowd. He couldn't even hear his friend's laughter over the crowds cheering. Tommy peered out of the doorway and gaped at the sight before him.

He stood at the beginning of a metal walkway that spanned the top of the stadium. He quickly moved out of the doorway and onto the catwalk, peering over the edge as he did so. He gasped, below them, a few hundred feet down, was the main arena. He realized, to his delight, they could see the entire arena from up here.

Tommy stared in wonder at the sight below him. On one side of the red line were two wielders, one had a hand thrust towards a small wall of fire while the other was tossing chunks of earth through the wall. The other side only had one wielder remaining, but she seemed to be holding her own against the onslaught of flaming terra raining down on her, dodging some and whipping others to the side with invisible air currents.

Tommy was in heaven. *This was the best day of his life.* League wielding made all the royal sports seem like child's play. This was rough and dirty and *amazing*.

Half the stadium groaned as the lone wind wielder was hit by a flying piece of earth and knocked outside the lines. A buzzer rang through the stadium, making Tommy's ears ring, and the two teams met in the middle of the arena. They each shook hands before limping off towards what Tommy assumed was some sort of locker room.

An announcer's voice rang through the stadium, announcing a fifteen-minute intermission before the next fight. Tommy grinned, glancing towards Purpled only to realize his friend had wandered further down the walkway. He and Punz now sat directly above the center of the arena, feet dangling over the side.

Tommy was quick to join them, throwing his feet next to Purpled's. "This is so fucking cool," Tommy breathed.

"I know," Purpled gloated. "Punz found the service entrance ages ago and since then we just watch the fights from up here. Only downside is it can get kinda loud."

“Don’t the guards notice?” Tommy asked, recalling the stony-faced men that watched them pass.

“Probably,” Punz shrugged. “None of them give a shit as long as we don’t upset the rich people or cause a scene.”

“Hungry?” Purpled offered the mysterious food over to him.

It was a strange mess of what looked like fried dough covered in something white. It reminded Tommy of the bird’s nest he’d seen one winter in the Palace gardens. He took a piece of it cautiously and popped it into his mouth.

It was delicious.

He had another piece and then another. The two boys ate the desert in relative silence

The sweetness of sugar coated his tongue and it was kind of chewy despite its fried nature. He moaned in delight. “What is this?” he finally asked, reaching for another piece.

Purpled shot him a strange look, “Is this another beet soup moment?”

Tommy groaned, “Is no one going to let me live that down?”

“No,” both brothers chirped.

Tommy scowled as he bit into the desert again.

“It’s funnel cake,” Purpled explained, allowing Tommy to take another piece.

Tommy grinned as the cake warmed his mouth, *he could get used to this.*

“Niki’s éclairs are better,” he teased.

“Obviously.”

“Will you two shut up? They’re announcing the next fight,” Pun interrupted.

For once, both boys listened and fell silent. Tommy was quick to shift his gaze back down to the arena. The two teams had already lined up on opposite sides of the arena. One team was dressed in pale yellow cloaks, each one slightly different than the last. The other team was donned similar cloaks in an obnoxiously familiar green color. The same color he and Purpled wore.

I guess he knew what team he was rooting for then.

From this high up he couldn’t really see any of the fighter’s faces, but he could make out the rather terrifying smiley face mask one of the green team’s members wore. Another had what looked like black war paint streaked around his eyes and the third wore comically large goggles over his face. The final member looked a bit out of place even though she too wore a mask. Tommy could tell from the first glance; she didn’t seem as comfortable as his teammates did.

The yellow team’s hoods remained up, but Tommy thought he could see hints of a mask on each of them as well.

“What’s up with the face stuff?” Tommy whispered to Purpled.

“Right, well mostly it’s tradition. League wielding used to be illegal and so all the fighters would wear masks to protect their identities now it’s more for anonymity. It’s a violent sport

with even more violent fans, best to make sure some disturbed individual doesn't try and hurt a fighter before a match," Purpled explained.

Tommy blanched, "Would someone actually try and hurt a fighter?"

"Oh yeah, a few years back some fan nearly beat the captain of a team who'd knocked their favorite team out of the championship race," Purpled nodded.

"Stars, that's insane!"

"Welcome ladies and gentlemen to another beautiful night in the Artic Arena! Let's give our fighters a round of applause!" an announcer's voice suddenly filled the air. The stadium shook with the sounds of hands clapping and more cheers ricocheted through the air, bouncing off the walls around them.

Holy shit, Purpled wasn't joking when he said it got loud. His ears were ringing.

"Now this next fight is not one you want to miss! We've got the reigning champions, the Dream Team, led by the undefeated XD!" The masked member from the man from the green side stepped forward and waved. The crowd erupted into screams and shouts.

The announcer paused waiting for the cheering and noise to die down. **"And in yellow we've got a new team, quickly becoming a serious contender for the crown, the Yaks! Give it up for their captain, Seapeekay!"** he paused again. The crowd erupted once more but this time Tommy could hear some people booing.

When the crowd had finally settled the announcer introduced the other three players on each team. The other Dream Team (which was a stupid name if you asked Tommy) fighters were Gogy (Tommy snorted hearing that name), Pandas (Tommy nearly fell off the walkway laughing), and Angel (it was better than pandas at least). The Yaks were just as bad with Quig, Smajor, and Shubble. What kind of names were these?

“These nicknames are shit,” Tommy huffed. “If I was done there, I’d be the Wife Haver!”

Purpled scoffed, “They’re not nicknames, they’re monikers!”

“Those are the same thing,” Tommy rolled his eyes.

“No, they aren’t!” Purpled insisted.

“Tommy’s right, they are shit but not as shit as *wife haver*,” Punz cut in.

“What’s wrong with the Wife Haver?” Tommy demanded.

“Well first off, you have no wives so it makes no sense,” Punz spoke slowly as if he was talking to a child.

“I have so many wives!” Tommy argued.

“Well, that’s illegal. You can only have one wife at a time,” Purpled told him earnestly.

“Course it is, everything I do is illegal,” Tommy boasted.

“Just shut the fuck up,” Punz sighed. “Let’s watch the match a pray that there’ll never be a day we see ‘the wife haver’ down there.”

Tommy huffed but turned his gaze back to the arena below them. The fighters were busy taking their starting positions in the arena. A moment later a loud ding sounded, and the match began.

It was only a few seconds in but Tommy realized he'd never seen wielding like this before. There was no structure or rigid movements, it was all power and desperation. Any force they could summon they used.

Pandas was brutal with his flames, they shot out from underneath the grate in sharp lines which acted as whips trying to knock people out of the center. The blue fire snapped at the opposing wind wielder, *Smajor* he was pretty sure until he was edged out of the arena. The first buzz sounded, one player out.

The crowd roared so loud Tommy swore he could feel the stadium move. "**Ooo, an early knockout for the Dream Team as Pandas has bullied Smajor out of bounds,**" the announcer's voice thundered around them once more.

Shubble, the female Yaks fighter, whipped up a small hurricane of water and shoved it in the direction of the opposing masked captain. XD was quick to move out of the way and shoot back a jet stream of air, knocking her to the ground. She was quick to jump up again and began lobbing balls of water towards any of the other fighters as they attacked, specifically aiming at Pandas and dousing his flames.

"It looks like Shubble is really causing some issues for the Dream Team. It would seem Pandas is having some performance issues!" the crowd laughed at the announcer's joke.

It was Gogy who caught one of her water bubbles and threw it back, hitting her in the stomach. The force of it knocked her down and XD sent another powerful stream of air that blew her far outside the red lines.

Another buzzer, the crowd got louder. **"That's knockout number two for the Dream Team! They're champions for a reason!"**

Quig, who had been focused on XD, suddenly began to shoot small streams of fire towards Angel. Angel, caught off guard, didn't have time to block the attack and stumbled back a few feet. She wobbled dangerously close to the edge of the red line. The entire stadium waited with bated breath as she struggled to right herself.

Tommy caught a blur of movement in his peripherals and turned just in time to watch Quig fire another bolt of flames. Angel, too busy trying to regain her balance, didn't notice the oncoming danger. The flames engulfed her and for a moment she was encased entirely in flames. Desperately she tried to put out the flames, uncaring as she stepped outside the boundaries. The buzzer rang loud and clear for the third time.

"And there she goes! Angel, rookie of the Dream Team, is the first of her teammates to be eliminated!"

Beside him, Purpled cursed, upset that one of his team's players had been knocked out. "That was totally illegal! That should so be a penalty!"

"Nah, see she's totally fine," Punz pointed towards the girl who had just found her seat beside the two eliminated Yaks fighters. She seemed to be sulking rather than burnt to a crisp.

"How is she still okay?" Tommy asked, eyes wide in disbelief. He'd just seen her swallowed up by flames!

"Soul fire, remember? It doesn't burn as hot. Besides, all the players can take a healing pot once they get off the floor if they want it," Purpled explained.

Another round of cheers brought Tommy's attention back to the fight. Quig and Seapeekay had seemed to have realized it would be easier to gang up on one person rather than try and fight all three of their opponents at once. Their target seemed to be Gogy, who they began pelting with gusts of wind and flames.

Their plan worked even though it allowed Pandas had gotten a few good shots in on Seapeekay. All it took to throw Gogy out of the ring was a rather large column of flames, probably propelled by a rather strong gust of wind. He tried to dodge the pillar of fire but tripped backwards over the line. A fourth buzzer rang loud.

"We hate to see it but that'll be knockout number two for the Yaks" the announcer spoke over the loud mixture of groans and cheers.

It was now an even fight once more. Two flame and wind wielders pitted against each other. The remaining fighters paced their sides, calling out attacks and returning them just as fiercely. The fighters dodged everything and, from what Tommy can tell, it didn't seem like either side is making any headway.

Suddenly the arena floor starts rumbling and the crowd's cheers loudened.

“Looks like we’re moving into overtime ladies and gents!” the announcer boomed.

“What’s happening?” Tommy asks.

“When rounds last longer than five minutes without a knockout the arena shrinks,” Purpled explained, not bothering to tear his eyes from the fight beneath them.

Sure enough, when Tommy looked back down at the arena the about a foot of each side was gone. *What the fuck?*

The fight below intensified, the tension in the arena was almost palpable. XD was quick to send three small tornados towards Seapeekay who swatted them away with his own strong gust of wind. But by doing this he opened him up to Panda’s flames, fire roared beneath the Yaks captain’s feet forcing him off the platform.

To his credit, Quig only offered a feral smile as he toed the new back edge of the arena. The flame wielder raised his arms as he summoned the largest wall of flames Tommy had ever seen. He heard Purpled gasp beside him, clearly this was not a normal occurrence.

Quig threw his arms forward, the fire following his command. Quickly the two remaining Dream Team members were engulfed in flames. It felt as if the flames lasted for an eternity before finally flickering out. When the flames finally died the crowd leaned forward, straining to see whatever the sight in front of them would be.

For a moment everything went still before the crowd dissolved into shouts and cheers. There the two men stood in the middle of a swirling sphere of wind, seemingly unharmed. Somehow, somehow, XD had done the impossible. Tommy found himself joining in with the crowd below.

The fight didn't last long after that. Quig, clearly exhausted from the massive display of wielding, was unable to defend himself against the onslaught of attacks from his opponents. In the end, it was a gentle gust of wind from XD that knocked him over the edge of the arena. The crowd went wild as the final buzzer rang out.

“Another win for the Dream Team, still undefeated this season! Fifteen minutes until the next fight starts,” the announcer tells the crowd.

Once the fighters had disappeared, Punz stood up and Purpled was quick to follow. Tommy stayed sitting, *he wanted to watch the next fight*, but Purpled reached down and dragged him from his spot. Grumbling, Tommy let his friends lead him back through the painting and downstairs.

They waited in the lobby area of the Arena for a few moments. They were clearly waiting for someone, judging by how both Purpled and Punz glanced around every few minutes. Tommy let his eyes wander while they waited.

He noticed a woman with rather striking orange hair that was hanging up a new poster. The fighter was posed against a mass of swirling flames. He wore a rather dramatic white shirt with puffy sleeves and a mask that looked like a fucking boar mask. *What kind of creepy shit did this sport create?* The name at the bottom of the poster read, ‘Protesilaus.’

A stupid name to match a stupid costume, he thought to himself. Purpled must have realized what he was staring at.

“The Blood God is so sick,” Purpled said as he nodded to the poster. *Excuse me?*

“What the actual fuck is the Blood God?”

“Well, Protesilaus is kind of a mouthful, so people started calling him the Blood God. When he fights people will just start chanting ‘blood’,” his friend explained as if what he’d said was not batshit insane.

“They chant what?” he shrieked “Why?”

Instead of answering him, Purpled’s gaze focused on something behind him. “Huh, does Alyssa always look that unhappy?” he asked.

Tommy had no clue who Alyssa was so he didn’t answer but he did turn to see what Purpled was looking at.

He did a double-take as he saw the female Dream Team fighter Angel, still wearing her green cloak but now without a mask, storming out of a side door. It was definitely her though. Her mouth was twisted in a scowl and her eyes were narrowed on the floor in front of her. A second later the doors burst open again and two men came through. One was still tying a bandana around his head and the other was rearranging his glasses. They were clearly chasing after the girl.

When they finally reached her the one wearing the bandana grabbed her wrist. Angel—*hadn’t Purpled called her Alyssa?*—yanked away from the grip. They proceeded to have a hushed but heated conversation before Alyssa stomped away again. This time, however, the boys did not follow her.

Who were those dudes? Tommy wondered, clearly it wasn’t a pleasant relationship.

He didn’t have to wonder long.

“George, Sapnap,” Punz called towards the strangers. *Weren’t those the names of Dream’s crewmates?*

The men's heads snapped towards them. Tommy recognized Sapnap from his visit to Dream's ship all those days ago. He'd never met George or Dream, apparently they were always together according to Purpled. But not now, now George was standing beside Sapnap with no third man in sight.

Tommy took a moment to look over the young man as he approached. He was about the same height as Sapnap, maybe an inch shorter, but he was certainly lankier. His eyes were two different colors as well, one a bright blue and the other a deep brown. There were a few strands of hair that had escaped the small bun his hair had been hastily shoved into.

Once they were within hearing range, Tommy shouted, "Where's your boyfriend, Georgie?"

The brunette's face turned a deep shade of red as he let out a shocked laugh. Sapnap, on the other hand, was losing his mind. "Oh stars, you have to keep him!" He told Punz as his hand found the mercenary's shoulder. The two men greeted Punz with a series of high fives and claps.

"And they call us children," Purpled whispered to him.

"That's the plan," Punz laughed and ruffled Tommy's hair. "Where *is* your boyfriend, George?" Punz continued, ignoring Tommy's grumbling.

"Shut up, he's cooling down in the back. You know how he gets," George shrugged.

"Did you guys see the match?" Tommy asked. "It was so cool! I can't believe I'd never seen one before!"

"This was your first league match?" Sapnap asked, his eyes wide with shock.

"Have you been living under a rock or something?" George asked.

“Meh, meh, meh I’m Georgie Weorgie and I’m dating Dreamie Weamie meh, meh, me!”

“What does that even mean?”

“Kid’s been sheltered his whole life. Purpled and I have been showing him the ropes,” Punz cut in, trying to head off the impending argument.

“Well, you’ve got great teachers kid,” Sapnap told Tommy. “Punz has probably lived at least three lifetimes by now.”

“I’ve only technically died once, and we had those totems, so we were fine!”

“Ugh,” George shivered in disgust. “Don’t ever mention those totems again, worst adventure of my life. We’re never letting Dream pick the adventures again.”

“Too right,” Sapnap laughed.

“Whatever, we get it you’re obsessed with your boyfriend—” Tommy broke in, bored of the current conversation.

“He’s not my boyfriend!”

“—but did either of you see the match? I’ve never seen bending like that before! The way XD created that air pocket, he’s insane!”

George and Sapnap shared an amused glance while Purpled placed his head in his hands.
“Tommy, how stupid are you?” He groaned

“What?” Tommy asked, genuinely confused.

“Of course they saw the fucking match, they’re Gogy and Pandas.”

“Huh—they’re—that’s not—no fucking way!” Tommy stammered.

“Guilty as charged,” Sapnap gloated.

Tommy wanted to slam his head into a wall, *how had he not noticed?* Sapnap still had black paint smudged beneath his eyes and Tommy could see the Gogy’s stupid ducking glasses sticking out of George’s pocket. Even the obnoxious shade of green he and Purpled wore matched the exact shade of the Nightmare’s sails. He was an idiot.

“You need to let Dream stop picking your color schemes,” Tommy sniffed.

Both boys burst into laughter once more. “He’s growing on me,” George grinned.

“Speaking of Dream, looks like he’s finally done cooling off,” Punz pointed back in the direction of where Sapnap and George had come from earlier.

If George was Gogy and Sapnap was Pandas, then that would mean XD was Dream. Tommy felt himself get lightheaded. Cursing he tried to take a few breaths. He was not going to freak out over meeting the super cool pro wielder, that would be embarrassing.

Once he no longer felt like passing out, he turned around to introduce himself to Dream. As he turned, blue eyes met a very familiar set of green ones.

“Tommy, you can’t hide from us!” Wilbur’s voice rang out around the palace courtyard.

“Oh, Tommy! We’re going to find you!” a much younger Dream sing-songed a moment later.

Tommy tried to quieten his giggles as he hid behind a statue from his brother and friend. When it was silent for a moment, Tommy peeked his head out to see where the two older boys had gone. Suddenly two pairs of hands pounced.

“Gotcha!” Dream cried. They had tackled Tommy into the snow, tickling him until his lungs ached.

“Stop, stop, please!” he’d begged between gasps.

“Only if you say we’re the best seekers ever,” Dream snickered.

“You’re the best, I’ve never met anyone better than you!” Tommy cried.

Finally, both boys pulled away. Wilbur got up, brushing the snow off his clothes, and ran inside, leaving Tommy and Dream alone in the courtyard. The older boy held out his hand to Tommy, who took it smiling.

“Thanks,” he chirped.

“I see you’ve finally been going to your etiquette classes,” Dream smirked.

Tommy huffed, crossing his small arms. “Yeah, they suck! Dad says I got to but the teacher is a meanie head,” he growled.

“Hmm, well that’s no good. How about we skip today’s lesson and I’ll show you some real hiding spots for next time?” Dream offered.

Tommy squealed and nodded furiously. That sounded so much more fun than lessons! Dream laughed at his excitement as he led the younger inside.

“Prince Thomas?” *Shit.*

Chapter End Notes

hi so this took a while to post but I'm already pretty far into the next chapter so it shouldn't take as long for the next update but who knows with me. I know it's a bit unrealistic for Tommy to have been gone for over a week and no one notice but shhhhh, just go with it. Anyway hope you enjoyed :)

a whole new brother

Chapter Summary

Looks like the cat's out of the bag! Tommy deals with the aftermath of people figuring out his secret.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Prince Thomas?”

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck! Of course, now he'd remember why Dream's name had sounded so familiar.

Punz's friend Dream, captain of the Nightmare Dream, was actually Sir Dream Taken. Probably the most notorious and wayward member of the Artic Knighthood. He was the son of the King's general and right-hand woman. He was a few years older than Wilbur, but he'd practically grown up alongside the princes in the palace. Dream had taken lessons with Techno and Wilbur, and he'd helped watch Tommy from time to time, for a long time Tommy had considered him a brother.

Tommy can still remember his knighting ceremony. The city had been decorated in blues and silvers in preparation for the newest knight. Dream had been the youngest person in a century to receive knighthood, so the entire city had been excited. Tommy had never seen the then 16-year-old so proud.

Dream had loudly proclaimed his fealty to the king in front of what felt like the entire empire. Then he'd knelt in front of each of Tommy's family and made a promise. When he'd gotten to Tommy at the end of the row, he'd knelt in front of him and gently took Tommy's hand in his. He'd stared up at Tommy and promised to always protect and serve him.

They'd spent the rest of the day eating sugared berries and playing the festival games that lined the streets. Tommy had trusted him.

Then he left one day when Tommy was barely twelve and he'd never heard from the man again. He'd been inconsolable for weeks. Wilbur had told him he'd become a pirate, but Tommy had never believed him. Huh, it would seem his brother wasn't far off.

"Is that really you?" Dream was closer now, barely an arm's length away. "Where are your guards?"

Tommy panicked, "I think you have the wrong guy, sorry big man!" *That was totally believable.*

Dream stared at him blankly. "You are literally the only person who uses the phrase 'big man', Tom."

Fuck, he'd forgotten how hard it was to lie to Dream. "Fine, you caught me. Now leave me alone!" he huffed and crossed his arms over his chest.

"Not until you tell me where your guards are," Dream demanded, looking around for Tommy's non-existent guards.

"I don't have any," he shrugged. He tried to feign nonchalance, ignoring the traitorous part of him that warmed at Dream's worried tone. *He left you, just like everyone else.*

"What do you mean, you don't have any? Thomas, you're a prince you have to have guards!"

"Don't need 'em, big man," he grinned.

Dream groaned, "Please don't tell me this is what's got Puffy all worried."

Tommy tensed for a second at the mention of Dream's parent and his father's right hand. Had someone finally realized he was gone? "Uhm, not sure?" he mumbled.

"How long have you been here?" Dream asked, incredulous.

"Maybe, like a week?"

"A week?" Dream repeated, staring at Tommy as if he'd grown a second head.

"or two?"

"TWO WEEKS!" Dream shrieked.

Tommy had to cover his ears at the volume. *Damn, Dream had lungs.* "Quiet down, big man, it's not a big deal!"

"No big—no big deal? Are you insane?" Dream looked close to fainting. "How has the royal guard not ransacked the city by now?"

"Probably cause no one's noticed I'm gone," Tommy grumbled.

That got Dream to pause, "How could no one have noticed a missing prince?"

"Wait, wait—everyone hold on!" Purpled interrupted, throwing his hands up. Tommy cringed internally, he'd been so caught up in his argument with Dream and had forgotten about his friend. "Tommy's not a prince!"

Dream glanced between the two boys, eyes wide with disbelief. "You haven't told him? Please tell me you've told someone, anyone?"

“Uh, Clara knows...”

“The kitchen lady?” Dream put his head in his hands.

“She’s a cook!” Tommy defended his friend.

“No, this is a joke! Tommy’s not a prince,” Purpled broke in once more.

Dream shot a pointed look in Tommy’s direction, urging him to say something. The fox was already in the chicken coop, he may as well just come clean. There was no way out, not anymore.

“Purpled don’t be mad,” he started.

“You’re not a prince!” Purpled cut him off.

“Well, I mean, I never formally abdicated when I left so yeah, I’m still a prince,” Tommy chuckled nervously. His hand found the back of his neck, rubbing it sheepishly.

“You’re a prince?” Purpled stared at Tommy as if he was seeing him again for the first time. Tommy flinched at the unrelenting gaze filled with confusion and betrayal.

“I did try to tell you before,” Tommy spoke softly, trying to soften the information.

“When?” Purpled demanded. “I think I would remember my best friend telling me he’s a prince!”

Despite the situation, a part of Tommy warmed hearing those words. He was still Purpled's best friend.

"After we almost got knifed in the alleyway," Tommy muttered.

"I'm sorry—after what?" Huh, Tommy didn't know Dream's voice could go that high.

"I thought you were joking!" Purpled cried, ignoring Dream's frantic mutterings.

"I never joke, everything I've ever said is true," Tommy deadpanned.

Purpled let out a strangled noise and lunged forward, probably to strangle him. *Fair enough.*

Punz held him back. "Okay, everyone time out!" the mercenary stepped in. Tommy startled, remembering, once again, they were not alone. Punz, Sapnap, and George had all heard everything.

Dammit!

"Why aren't you freaking out right now?" Purpled's gaze, and subsequent anger, locked onto his brother. "Did you know?"

Punz scoffed, "He couldn't tell cotton from wool, of course I knew he wasn't some random street rat!"

Tommy felt his face flush, "No one else realized," he muttered.

A hysterical giggle bubbled out from Purpled, "This is not happening." His friend turned around sharply and marched towards the doors.

Tommy reached out and grabbed his wrist, trying to stop him.

“Don’t!” Purpled shouted, yanking his arm away as if Tommy’s touch burned him. “Please, just don’t,” his voice softened to a whisper as he turned and continued towards the doors.

Tommy faltered for a second before trying to chase after his friend, only to be stopped by Punz’s hand on his shoulder.

“Give him some space, this is a lot for him to take in,” the older murmured. He seemed to sense Tommy’s uncertainty because he continued, “He’ll come back and if he doesn’t, I’ll talk to him. Right now though he needs space and some time to understand everything.”

Tommy relented, allowing his body to relax. He could wait. He would wait a hundred years if it meant he and Purpled could still be friends. He needed to trust Purpled, trust that he’d come back for him. Purpled wasn’t like everyone else, he wouldn’t leave.

A part of him wants to hit Dream, or himself, for letting Purpled find out this way. However, he knew there was no changing the past. He’d made his bed, and now it was time to lie in it. Purpled would come back, he would forgive Tommy and they’ll be back to throwing way too much bread at the ducks by the docks again, and everything will be fine. He just has to give it time.

Time. It would seem he might not have that much of it left. If what Dream said was true and Captain Puffy had noticed his absence, then it was only a matter of time before the guards were deployed. He would hate for something bad to happen to any of his new friends just because they’d known where he was the whole time.

“You can’t tell anyone I’m here,” he said suddenly, turning back towards the four men.
“Please!” he begged.

“I wasn’t planning on it,” Punz shrugged.

The other three seemed a bit more hesitant. George and Sapnap seemed to have some sort of silent conversation before they both shrugged.

“Sure, I don’t care,” George rolled his eyes.

Dream remained silent, he looked torn. “Tommy, you can’t just abandon your duties,” he scolded gently. “Besides your father is probably worried sick right about now.”

Tommy bristled at the mention of duties. What duties did he even have? Besides going to those star-stricken classes. What did Dream know of duties, anyway? Last time Tommy checked, the knight had fucked off to who knows where without a second thought for his own duties. Bringing up his anger now wouldn’t help him, so he swallowed his emotions before responding.

“I doubt it,” Tommy huffed. “He never noticed me before.”

The knight sighed. “What does mean?”

“It means I’ve been gone for nearly two weeks and people are just now noticing I’m gone. It means no one in that stars forsaken castle gives two fucks about me and what I do,” he shouted.

All four men’s faces fell. “Tommy, you can’t know that. Your family loves you,” Dream tried.

“Sure they do,” Tommy agreed sarcastically. “They love me so much it probably took your mom for anyone to notice I was missing!”

“Hey, we’re not going to tell anyone,” Sapnap reassured him, placing a gentle hand on his shoulder.

Tommy stared at the raven-haired man in shock. He hadn't expected Sapnap to go against Dream, neither had Dream judging by his surprised face.

"But—" the knight began.

"No," Sapnap interrupted, his tone soft but firm. "If he doesn't want to go back, we shouldn't force him to. It's not right."

He and Dream stared at each other for a few silent seconds, waiting to see who would give first. To his surprise it was who Dream glanced away first, tearing his gaze down to the floor.

"Fine, but you shouldn't be running around as you please, especially not alone. If someone finds out a prince has gone missing, it won't be hard to put the pieces together," Dream sighed.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you!" Tommy chanted and threw his arms around the knight, who tensed in surprise but quickly relaxed.

"Yeah, yeah, you little gremlin," Dream ruffled his hair.

"I think this has been enough excitement for the evening," George's voice broke them apart. "I'm tired and hungry so can we please get a move on."

"Yeah, Calla's saved us a table," Punz chimed in.

"Fuck yeah! I love Calla's stew," Sapnap cheered.

"Please, you'd eat garbage if it was hot enough," Dream teased.

“Fuck off!”

“Are you coming with us?” Dream asked Tommy as they headed towards the doors.

“Nah,” Tommy shook his head. “I’ve got to get back. Niki’s probably wondering where I am.”

“I’ll walk you back then,” Dream’s tone left no room for argument, but Tommy was nothing if not contrary.

“That’s alright, I don’t wanna freak her out by having a knight bring me home,” he grinned.

“Aw, come on Dream! Let the kid have little fun,” Punz laughed.

Dream sighed, sensing this was not a fight he would win and gave in. “Fine, but we are going to have a nice long chat tomorrow morning about personal safety.”

“Sure, we’ve got a lost time to make up,” his tone was bordering on bitter and his grin was sharp. Judging by how Dream tensed, he got the message. *I’m pissed you lied, you left and didn’t have the decency to tell me.*

“Of course, we’ve both got some explaining to do,” Dream agreed but his smile was strained.

Tommy nodded before giving everyone a quick wave and ducking down a random alleyway. He took a moment to process everything that happened in the last hour. *Dream is suddenly home again, Purpled knows he’s a prince, Purpled is pissed at him, Sapnap is not a complete loser.* Okay, things could be much worse. Punz was still on his side, and no one was going to immediately tell the palace where was. He could do this.

Despite what he told Dream, he doesn’t go straight back to Niki’s. Instead, he took a detour by the docks. He made his way to a very familiar spot at the end of the pier. It felt strange to

be here without Purpled, wrong in some sense of the word. Still, he took a seat on the weathered wood and began to watch the water gently lapping below him.

The longer he sat, the more he thought. He knew he should've told Purpled the truth earlier, but he'd been so afraid of losing the first friend he'd made without a crown on his head staining its validity. Now it was too late, Tommy had still ended up losing him. *No, he hadn't lost Purpled yet!*

As he looked out at the waves, he was surprised to spot a little dolphin calf swimming near him. Dolphins didn't usually swim this far north, the water was too cold for them.

"Hey buddy, you're awfully far from home," he smiled down at the animal. "Me too."

The calf made a high chittering sound.

"Yeah, your family probably cares lots about you. I bet your parents are probably looking for you. Phil probably hasn't even realized I'm gone. I doubt any of them have noticed, actually."

He paused for a moment, staring at the sea animal below him. The dolphin stared back with a weirdly human gaze. *She looked like a Sally.*

"It's kinda hard to blame them though," he sighed. "Phil's busy with king shit and Wil's got all this pressure on him. Tech's always been busy with training, and I know Tubbo isn't trying to avoid me or anything. They're all just... too busy for me."

The dolphin made another chittering sound, this time it sounded sadder somehow.

"They're not that bad, really, they've just got their own stuff going on. It was just so lonely and everyone wanted me to go to lessons where these pretentious tutors kept telling me how much of an idiot I was," he huffed.

A gentle whine came from below him.

“It’s whatever, at least now I’ve got Purpled— or well had. I fucked things up real bad with him and I don’t think he’ll ever forgive me.”

Another whine came from the sea animal, this one higher-pitched than the last one.

“It’s okay, it was my fault anyway. I should have told him the truth sooner,” Tommy smiled sadly at the dolphin below him.

“You should’ve,” Purpled’s voice sounded behind him.

Tommy pitched forwards, nearly falling into the sea if it weren’t for Purpled’s sudden grip on the back of his shirt. The blonde yanked him backward, away from the edge. “Careful, it’s getting a little too cold to be taking a dip anymore.”

“Stars, Purpled, you scared the shit out of me! Sally and I were just talking about you,” he motioned towards the dolphin below him.

As if she could sense they were talking about her, Sally began swimming in small circles and chittering.

“You named the strange dolphin?” Purpled stared at him bewildered.

“Course I did, I couldn’t spill all my secrets to her if we weren’t on a first-name basis!”

Purpled raised one very unimpressed eyebrow, “Oh I see, you named a dolphin so you could talk shit about me behind my back.”

“Don’t worry, Sally isn’t a gossip,” Tommy waved him off. “She’s very good at keeping secrets.”

“She’s a fish.” Purpled deadpanned.

“Fuck off, she’s a dolphin!”

“So?”

“Dolphins aren’t fish!”

“Uh, yeah they are.”

“No, they most certainly are not!”

“They have fins and they swim in the ocean, they’re fucking fish!”

“They need to breathe air and they like raise their kids or some shit, they’re not fish!”

“When did you become a fucking scientist then?”

“I’m not a scientist, one of my tutors was just really into marine life,” Tommy huffed.

“Right, one of your royal tutors,” Purpled bit out.

Tommy felt himself deflate. “I don’t think I can apologize enough for everything,” he mumbled.

Purpled quietly took a seat next to him. “Yeah, I know, just—just don’t do it again, okay?”

Tommy grinned, “Never again.”

“I’m sorry too,” Purpled said after a moment. “Punz talked some sense into me and I realize now I shouldn’t have just run off like that.”

“It’s alright, I shouldn’t have hidden who I was from you.”

Purpled sighed. “I get why you didn’t tell me at first, but it’s been weeks. Were you ever going to tell me?”

“Yes! Probably—maybe? I don’t know,” Tommy couldn’t bring himself to look at his friend. “I was kind of hoping to just let that part of my life go.”

“But why? You were a *prince*!”

“Yeah, and it wasn’t all that great!” Tommy snapped. Quickly he reeled in his anger. “Sorry, I get what you mean. Who would want to give up being a prince? I never had to worry about food or clothes, and I lived in a safe, big house. But I was just always so alone...”

“You gave up a life of royalty because you were lonely?” Disbelief coated Purpled’s tone.

“You don’t get it, I lived like a ghost in my own home! Every day I woke up wondering if anyone would notice my existence other than to scold me,” Tommy pleaded, desperation clear in his voice. He needed Purpled to understand. “That’s why I started coming here—”

“To see if they’d notice you,” his friend breathed.

“Yeah, but it didn’t work. It’s been weeks and there’s no mention of a missing prince anywhere,” Tommy huffed.

“Maybe they’re just trying to find you quietly like so kidnappers or something don’t realize you’re basically free for the taking?” Purpled offered.

“Nah, Dream’s mom works for my dad and he said she’s not mentioned anything about a missing prince so,”

Silence reigned as both boys decided how they wanted the conversation to continue.

“Your family sounds like a bunch of dicks,” Purpled muttered.

“Yeah, they can be but they’re my family so I kind of have to love them,” Tommy shrugged.

“Bullshit, blood doesn’t mean shit,” Purpled spat. “You’re my family and I would never treat you like that!”

Tommy felt his eyes tear up, “I’m your family?” his voice was quiet as if he spoke too loud Purpled would take it all back.

“Of course, you’re my brother,” Purpled stated firmly. “And I’d like to be yours, if you’d let me?” his voice wobbled as he asked. Tommy found he hated the nervous frown Purpled wore, it didn’t suit the normally confident boy.

Tommy didn’t even try to stop the tears as they fell down his cheeks. “I thought you hated me,” he sniffled. “I thought you’d leave me like everyone else.”

Purpled, *his brother*, yanked him into a tight hug and Tommy melted into his arms. “Never,” Purpled swore.

They sat like that, wrapped in each other’s arms, for what felt simultaneously like an eternity and not long enough at the same time. A loud chittering noise from below finally pulled them apart.

“Hi, Sally! Kinda forgot you were done there,” Tommy laughed wetly.

Purpled narrowed his eyes at the animal. “You tell anyone I cried and I’ll be eating dolphin stew for dinner,” he threatened.

“Stop being mean to Sally,” Tommy scolded. Purpled just rolled his eyes in response.

Tommy ignored his friend in favor of watching the waterline. In the distance, Tommy saw a small burst of water followed by a new chittering sound. Sally let out a series of noises that Tommy interpreted as something good.

“Looks like your family found you after all,” Tommy smiled sadly down at his new friend.

This time Sally didn’t respond, instead turning tail and swimming back to her mother’s side. He glanced over at Purpled who wore a small smile while watching the reunion.

“I think I found mine too,” he whispered to himself.

He wiped snot and tears from his face, wiping them on the boy next to him. Purpled glanced at the new wet spot that had formed on his cloak as a result of their earlier hug.

“Eww!”

“Karma, bitch!” Tommy giggled.

Tommy let himself relax next to his brother as he smiled up at the stars above them. It was a nice night, he noted. A bit colder than he liked but the harvest season was winding down so it was to be expected. What Tommy really liked was how clear the stars were tonight, not a single cloud or city light to obstruct their brightness. He’d almost forgotten how much he missed them.

He traced the familiar patterns of stars above him, connecting them in his head with invisible strings. He paused on a familiar cluster. “Hercules,” he smiled as he pointed towards the constellation.

Purpled stared at him for a moment, brow furrowed. “Huh?”

Tommy laughed at his friend’s obvious confusion. “Those stars, over there, the ones that look like a lopsided trapezoid with legs,” he traced the constellation for the other. “It makes up the constellation Hercules.”

“Is this more weird prince shit, like the dolphins?”

Tommy shoved his friend, laughing. “No, not really. My mom’s the one who taught us all the different constellations before she—” he coughed slightly, he couldn’t dislodge the words from his throat so he decided to move on. “Hercules was always Techno’s favorite. Said he liked all that heroic shit, but I think he just felt bad for the guy.”

“Oh,” Purpled whispered because what else was there to say. “How does someone feel bad for a hero?”

Tommy smiled, still staring at the stars above them. “His step-mom was this god lady and she really had it out for him. Tried to kill him a bunch when he was a kid and when she got fed up she sent a plague of madness that caused him to kill his wife and kids. Really tore the guy up, ya know? So he went to this other god dude and explained how guilty he felt so the god gave him these like impossible tasks to complete as repentance,” Tommy explained vaguely.

Techno had always been the one who really enjoyed and remembered all the different stories. Tommy had just liked to hear their mother talk as he stares at the patterns in the stars till his lips turned blue.

“Jeez, that’s awful! Did he do the tasks?”

“I think so, that’s why he’s got a constellation,” Tommy waved towards the constellation. “Techno always said he wanted to conquer the impossible one day, but I think he was really just afraid of losing us.”

“Which one is your favorite, then?” Purpled shifted the conversation, probably sensing Tommy’s sadness.

Tommy thought for a moment. “Libra, the scales of justice,” he finally settled on, pointing towards an odd clump of stars that vaguely resembled a t-shape.

“They’re associated with Themis, goddess of divine order and law. She’s all about being honest and just, she’s even got this sword which she can use to cut the truth from lies,” Tommy explained.

“That sounds so badass!”

“Yeah, I figure I could use a little more honesty in my life,” he said and Purpled snorted.

“Wait so if you’re actually a prince, does that mean the guard can never arrest us again?”

Tommy paused, letting his eyes go wide in fake realization. “Stars, Purpled we’re invincible now! We can steal from all the shops, and I’ll just tell the guards I’m the lost prince and they’ll let us go!”

Both boys burst out laughing.

Eventually, they managed to calm down and Tommy found himself simply enjoying Purpled's company.

"Thanks for staying, brother," he whispered but kept his gaze firmly locked on the sky above them, unwilling to see Purpled's reaction.

Then, suddenly, he felt a gentle pressure on his shoulder. He glanced down for a moment, only to be met with the blonde's head resting on his shoulder. He felt himself smile so wide his cheeks began to strain.

"I'll always stay for you, brother," Purpled promised.

Tommy could feel tears resurfacing at the sincerity in his brother's voice. He couldn't handle crying again tonight.

"Niki's gonna be so worried," Tommy sighed but made no move to get up for their position.

"Oh yeah, she's gonna kill you," Purpled snorted but also remained in place, head firmly resting on Tommy's shoulder.

A few more moments of peace couldn't hurt.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the cliffhanger last time but it was fun :) anyway I just couldn't keep the golden duo apart. I hope you guys liked this chapter and I'll try and update again soon-ish (I've got the beginning of the next chapter started and it's kinda cute ngl) but yeah enjoy!

what a wonderful life

Chapter Summary

Dream and Tommy have a chat and Tommy begins to understand how loved he truly is.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Where have you been?”

Tommy cringed, abandoning his quiet attempt at opening the door to Niki’s apartment in favor of grinning sheepishly at the angry woman. Niki stood in the center of the living room with her hands on her hips. Her expression was clearly unhappy but Tommy could see the relief that flashed across her face when he’d entered. He felt terrible for worrying her.

“Sorry, Niki,” he mumbled. “I was out at the league match with Purpled and we got into a fight.”

Her expression softened as she sat down, motioning for him to join her. She waited until he was curled next to her to speak. “Do you want to talk about it?”

Tommy shrugged, “We already made up, it was my fault anyways. I hid some really important stuff from him and he found out.”

Niki hummed, running gentle fingers through his hair. He melted further into her side, leaning as far into the hand as he could. She chuckled lightly at his movements.

“Sometimes we do the wrong things for what we think are the right reasons. Why were you hiding those things?”

"I was afraid it would change how he saw me, I was afraid he wouldn't want to be my friend any longer," he whispered.

"Please, I see the way Purpled looks at you, he'd murder a man for you," Niki snorted. "It must have been pretty serious stuff if it caused a fight."

Tommy looked down at his hands. He wondered if Clara had ever told Niki he was a prince. She'd never said anything to indicate she knew but he wouldn't put it past Niki to just be trying to make him feel comfortable. She deserved to know, he decided.

"It was about my uh—my status," he stumbled.

"Ah yes, I see how that might upset him," Niki nodded. "I imagine it's quite a shock to find out your best friend is royalty."

Tommy glanced up at her, searching her for any signs of upset at his deceit. She waved off his concerns, "I'm not mad, I've known for a while."

"Did Clara tell you?"

"No, but I knew she worked in the castle and she told me to keep an eye out for a grubby, blonde boy she knew from work. And you're not exactly subtle, it wasn't hard to put together."

Tommy huffed, that's what Punz had said too. "I'm the most subtle guy in the world! The most subtle, biggest man."

Niki laughed, "Does this mean I have to call you your highness now?"

Tommy's nose scrunched in disgust. "Stars no, I'll leave right out those doors and never look back!"

“Alright, fine. But please let me know if there’s anything I can do to make your stay more comfortable... your highness,” she grinned.

Tommy didn’t miss a beat. “You could give me the bed,” he smirked.

“Nice try, my house, my bed.”

She ignored Tommy’s complaints, instead she pulled out a book from the side table and propped her feet up before beginning to read. After a few moments, Tommy felt himself begin to nod off. Niki’s hand stopped its motions for a moment causing him to whine. She gave a quiet laugh before resuming and he settled once more.

It had been a long time since someone had treated him so gently. For a moment he thought he could smell lavender and cinnamon, but a draft carried it away before he could be certain. He fell asleep on that couch, curled up against Niki as she ran a hand through his curls.

Turns out Niki was not as forgiving as Tommy had thought. She’d woken him up earlier than usual that morning. Her excuse was that ‘a prince should know better than to break curfew’ to which he promptly reminded her he was a runaway prince. That comment had gotten a flick of flour to his face.

While they worked, Tommy explained the previous night in depths. Allowing Niki to chime in or ask questions as she pleased.

“So what you’re saying is Dream, who is actually a knight, totally called you out in front of all your and his friends about being a prince. And Purpled heard, then got pissed at you and stormed off, understandably, but then a dolphin helped you guys work out your issues?”

“Yep, sounds about right,” Tommy grinned.

Niki shook her head in disbelief before turning back to the pastry dough she was rolling out. “Kids nowadays,” she huffed.

“You know you love me,” Tommy sang.

“Yeah, unfortunately, I do,” Niki laughed but Tommy froze at the sincerity in her tone.

He still wasn’t used to people so casually telling him they loved him. His family had always kept their emotions close to the breast, even Purpled had yet to use the L word. But here was Niki, the kindest woman he’d ever met who had taken him with no questions asked, telling him she loved him.

“Are you okay, Tommy?” Niki’s voice was soft and Tommy realized she was now in front of him.

“Ahem—yeah, yes!” he coughed. “I—I love you too.”

Tommy ducked his head, ignoring the older girl’s coos. They worked in silence after that, only speaking to ask for ingredients. They both shot each other wide grins when they caught the other’s eyes.

“Let’s make some éclairs,” Niki suddenly announced.

Tommy glanced at her in surprise. Niki usually made the harder pastries, like the éclairs, by herself because Tommy was bound to fuck them up. Still, he was not about to pass up an opportunity to make the best fucking desert in the world.

He nodded, abandoning the small apple pies he’d been working on and following Niki to a clean space of counter. She began by laying out an assortment of ingredients they’d need for the desert: sugar, flour, a bit of cocoa powder. When everything was laid out, she showed him

how to prep and make the dough. Carefully demonstrating how to mix everything and fit it into a piping bag.

She'd piped a few out, just to show him how they were supposed to look, then let him take over. His did not look nearly as nice as Niki's but she still clapped and cheered after each one. She'd even let him put them into the oven at the end, which turned out to be an error on her part because he'd forgotten to set a timer and they'd ended up burning.

The second round of éclairs had gone slightly better, they were less lumpy than the first and weren't charred when they were pulled from the ovens. Once they'd cooled, Niki showed him how to poke holes in the bottom before she'd filled them with custard. She'd even shown him the best way to dip them in the chocolate sauce to prevent dripping.

He and Niki were in the middle of testing the quality of their products (which really just meant Tommy was shoving as many éclairs into his mouth as he could while Niki watched with mild disgust) when they heard the door open. He shot Niki a questioning look, they didn't usually get customers this early in the shop unless they were picking up an order. She appeared just as confused as he was. They both moved slowly to the front of the shop.

Tommy nearly turned back into the kitchens when he saw who stood on the other side of the front counter. There, dressed in full knight attire (stupid cape and everything), was Dream. Tommy had been hoping he was joking about that talk, apparently he wasn't.

As if she could sense his urge to run back, Niki closed the kitchen door behind her.

"Hello, I suppose you're here for Tommy?" Niki greeted the knight.

"Yeah, I figured we could go for a walk?" Dream asked, turning towards the blonde.

"I don't know who you think you are, Big D, but—"

"Don't call me that!"

“A walk sounds great,” Niki stepped in before an argument ensued.

Tommy hesitated for a moment, “But what about the market? Won’t you need help with all the pastries?” He shot her a pleading look, hoping she understood he did not want to leave with the knight.

Niki only shot him an annoyed glance. “I’ll be fine, Tommy, I’ve done it on my own a hundred times before. Go on, I’ll see you tonight,” she reassured him. She had an odd smile on her face though, something almost mischievous. Tommy nearly gasped, she was doing this on purpose.

“Wonderful, but first go clean up,” Dream motioned towards his clothes which had gotten covered in flour and eggs.

Tommy smirked, “What, do you think I’m dirty or something?” His hand dipped into the flour behind him as he began inching closer.

Dream must’ve known what that smile meant for him because he started backing up slowly.
“Nu-uh, get away from me you gremlin child!”

Tommy ignored his warning and kept advancing. When he was close enough to the knight, he lunged forward. The older didn’t hesitate to throw an arm out, hand set firmly against the top of Tommy’s head preventing him from moving any closer.

“Fuck you, bitch!” he cried, arms flailing as flour misted through the air. When everything had settled, Tommy noticed not a single speck of white ended up on the knight’s uniform.
Bitch.

“Okay, now that that’s done go get dressed,” Dream ordered him, pushing him away gently.

When the younger made no move to leave, the knight let out an exasperated huff. “Fine, I’ll get you anything you want from the market,” he offered.

Tommy thought for a moment, there was a broadsword he’d been wanting to get his hands on for ages but the thing was too big for Purpled to swipe. “Anything?”

“Within reason,” Dream confirmed, a little more hesitant now.

“Deal, bitch!” Tommy cried before Dream could take his offer back.

“Wonderful, now go clean your grubby hands,” Dream smiled pleasantly.

Tommy grumbled the whole way to the bathroom, but Dream simply ignored his angry rambling in favor of talking with the baker. It only took him a few moments to change and brush out his hair before he deemed himself presentable. When returned, the older two were still chatting.

“Then he tried to convince the guards that he’d hypnotized them,” Dream wheezed.

That motherfucker!

“Oi, dickhead, stop telling people my secrets!” Tommy huffed.

“Aw, but you were so adorable,” Niki cooed.

“I still am adorable, bitch,” he sniffed.

“Of course you are,” Dream soothed. “Now can we leave?”

Tommy sighed and nodded, better to get this over with. He tossed his legs over the counter, throwing his apron towards a disgruntled Niki.

“No feet on the counter!” she scolded him.

“Sorry,” he grinned not sounding too apologetic.

He ducked the oncoming swat and quickly moved towards the exit, snatching Dream’s hand as he passed, and waved to Niki as they left.

They walked in quiet for a while, wandering closer to the market. It was awkward, clearly neither party knew what to say. He could feel the older twisting around occasionally, watching the royal guards that roamed the streets as they passed. A few of the guards nodded their heads toward the Dream who would freeze for a moment before giving a stiff nod in return. Tommy could see the line of tension in the man’s shoulders through the chest plate and blue cape.

“Big D—”

“Don’t call me that.” Tommy rolled his eyes.

“Big man,” he corrected, “calm down. I’ve been here for weeks and none of them have recognized me. If you keep walking like there’s a stick up your ass, they might get suspicious.”

The older shot an annoyed look at him but he did loosen his shoulders. “Sorry, it’s almost like I’m walking around with a runaway prince and, if caught, could be tried for treason against the empire.”

“Wait, seriously?” Tommy looked to the older, eyes wide.

“Wha—yes! How did you not know this?”

“I dunno, just didn’t seem like a big deal,” he shrugged.

“Toms, you’re a prince,” Dream sighed. “Everything you do has weight, it carries meaning.”

“It doesn’t feel like that,” he crossed his arms.

Dream’s steps faltered, “Is this about the king?”

“Maybe, maybe not.”

“C’mon, I can’t help if you don’t tell me what’s wrong,” Dream nudged Tommy gently. It felt almost familiar, distant memories flickered but he pushed himself forward.

Tommy stared at the stones beneath them as they walked, kicking loose stones as they passed
“They all just suck. None of them have time for me and I get it, they’ve got shit to do but I miss them.”

He didn’t look up from the street, trying to hide the tears welling up in his eyes. “Like I knew Phil kind of hated me or whatever, but Wilbur and Tech? They were supposed to be my brothers! And don’t even get me started on Tubbo!”

“The gardener’s son?” Dream asked, confusion lacing his tone.

“Right, Phil adopted him after you left,” Tommy mumbled. Sometimes he forgot how quickly Tubbo had become permanent in Tommy’s life, most days it just felt as if he’d always been there. “We’d been best friends for a bit and suddenly Phil was adopting him and it was like I didn’t matter to him anymore. He even got a new best friend!” Tommy grimaced.

He hated thinking about his family anymore. The sadness and desperation had long since faded leaving only a roiling pit of anger in the young prince now. The rocks beneath them began shaking.

“Woah, it’s alright, Toms!” Dream stopped them and pulled Tommy close, arms wrapping around his shoulders. Tommy snaked his arms around the knight’s waist.

“I just couldn’t take it anymore, I felt so... unloved,” he croaked.

“Never again, Toms, you are so loved,” Dream rubbed circles into his back.

They stood like that for a moment before pulling apart. Tommy laughed wetly, “Sorry, I needed that.”

“Don’t apologize for that, we all deserve a break sometimes,” Dream smiled and swung an arm around the younger’s shoulder.

Tommy snorted, “Yeah, I’m sure you’re always needing a break, Mr. Youngest-Knight-in-a-Century.”

The knight didn’t answer right away and when Tommy glanced at him, he had a far-off look in his eyes. “We all need a break,” Dream said at last.

They continued their walk in silence for a bit. Tommy tried to make sense of Dream’s weird attitude. He soon abandoned those thoughts though as they entered the market square. Tommy took the lead, bringing them to a very specific stall near the center of the market. Despite the confused noise Dream made, he followed without complaint. As they stopped in front of a familiar stall. Dream groaned at the sight of swords and bows on display.

“No, nope!” Dream shook his head. “I’m not getting you a weapon you probably have no idea how to use.”

Tommy shot the man an affronted look, “Techno could’ve taught me how to fight!”

“Did he?”

“...No.” Dream rubbed a hand down his face. “You promised me anything,” Tommy reminded him.

Dream was quiet for a moment, “Fine, bu—” Tommy let out a loud whoop. “*But*, you have to let me train you with whatever you get. I’m not going to be responsible for the first prince in Empire history beheading himself.”

“Yes, anything for you Big D,” Tommy grinned.

“I told you to stop— you know what, I don’t care. Go get what you want and let me pay for this,” Dream shooed him away.

Tommy laughed as he bounded over to one of the displays further into the stall. He sorted through a few of the swords till he found the one he’d had his eye on. It was long but compared to most broadswords it was barely average, only extending a foot past his arm’s length. Tommy didn’t care much for length, he liked the three tigers eye stones embedded on each end of the crossguard and the base of the hilt. Each gem was etched with wielding runes, powerful ones too. A sword as powerful as this one would be able to channel his magic.

He ran his fingers along the blade, the sword hummed under his touch. He grinned, it matched so well with his own magic. He picked it up swiftly, swishing it around, trying to gauge its weight. It was well balanced. He knew this word was meant for him, it had to be. As an afterthought, he also grabbed a plain leather scabbard similar in height to the blade length.

Grinning he trotted back over to Dream, who had struck up a conversation with the stall owner. “I see your point but for a quick fight, in close quarters, a long sword is just too wieldy. You won’t have time to swing before your opponent has a knife in your stomach.”

Cheery. Tommy could see the pained look on the merchant’s face, clearly he hadn’t realized how serious Dream could get about weapons. Deciding to save the poor man, Tommy stepped in, “Big D, this is the one!” He waved his sword in front of him, ignoring Dream’s exasperated sigh and the merchant’s more panicked gasp.

“Yeah, okay—watch it!” Dream warned as he back away quickly to avoid the oncoming blade. “I can’t buy you anything if you kill me.”

That was a good point. Tommy shrugged and sheathed the sword. “Fine, bitch.”

The merchant was clearly unsettled by the pair and was quick to negotiate prices with Dream. The coward had given in after like two rounds of bartering, giving the sword to Dream for nearly half price but Tommy wasn’t going to complain.

He was all giddy as they walked from the stall, bouncing slightly as they walked. He traced the runes carved into the leather handle. It was truly a work of master craftsmanship. He hadn’t seen a sword this nice since he’d left the castle. It wasn’t as impressive as Techno’s zweihänder, fondly nicknamed the Orphan Obliterator, but it had its own charm.

“We’ll have to get you a bow too, if you plan on staying here,” Dream told the younger. “If you want to make it through the winter you should get stockpile some meat.”

“Can’t I just buy some from the market?”

“Sure, if you want to pay some insane prices. The vendors always increase the prices right before and during the cold season.”

Tommy grimaced, he'd never really hunted before. He'd gone ice bird shooting before but that didn't really count. Technoblade had always been the one to go on hunts with the king. He'd only had a few basic archery lessons back at the castle, most of his education tended to revolve around his *manners*. Tommy made a disgusted face at the thought of his etiquette tutor. "Yeah, ok but you'll have to teach me how to use one of those too."

"I'll probably have George do it, he's better with a bow than me."

"Gross, your boyfriend is going to teach me how to shoot my shot," Tommy teased.

"Wha—he's not," Dream wheezed. "George is not my boyfriend!"

"If you say so, Punz doesn't seem to agree," Tommy smirked.

"Punz is an idiot."

Tommy shrugged, "Fair enough."

They walked out of the market square and towards Purpled's place. Tommy was pretty proud of how quickly he was acclimating to the city. He no longer felt lost all the time. The city was smaller than he'd thought, with a lot of twists and shortcuts, but Tommy was slowly learning them all. A few weeks ago, he'd have been trailing behind Dream, unsure of his next steps, now he walked confidently beside the man.

"How come you never told Purpled about your status?" Dream asked suddenly.

Tommy was taken aback for a moment, his steps faltering but he quickly recovered. "Uh, I don't know, it just never seemed the right time," it came out more like a question than answer.

“You’re an awful liar,” Dream laughed. “Seriously though, Punz talks about you two all the time. He even wrote about you in one of his letters, ‘Purpled met this absolute menace of a child and I don’t think I’ve seen them apart for longer than a night’,” Dream pitched his voice in imitation of the mercenary.

Tommy felt his heart warm, *Punz talked about him?*

“I guess I was worried they’d leave, I guess,” Tommy shrugged. He knew his feigned nonchalance fooled no one.

“Oh come on, Purpled loves you. He’d never leave you, especially not over something like that. How could you even think that?”

“Because that’s what always happens,” he snorted. “Everyone always leaves me.”

“Your family doesn’t count, they’re dicks,” Dream stated firmly.

“You left too,” Tommy whispered.

He wanted to take back the words almost as much as he wished he could forget the last two years, but he couldn’t. Dream leaving had hurt almost as much as Wilbur’s closed doors or Techno’s silence. He didn’t understand what had happened, one night Dream was there and the next he was gone never to be heard from again. He was given no explanation, offered no solace, just left to deal with yet another abandonment. He couldn’t find it in himself to be mad, he was just so tired of being angry at people. He just wanted some clarification. Was he really so unlovable?

Dream looked at him, devastation written across his face. “Tommy I never meant to leave you, you have to understand that!”

“But you did!” he cried. “You left me alone in that cold, awful palace. I trusted you, I loved you and you just left like that didn’t mean anything. Like I didn’t mean anything!”

“It wasn’t about you,” Dream said, voice quiet as if he was talking to a frightened animal.

“Then what was it about? You’re promising to always be there for me one day and then poof you’re gone the next! What else was I supposed to think?”

“I couldn’t do it!” Dream finally yelled. “I just couldn’t handle everything, you know? I was barely 16 and I had no idea what I was doing with my life. I’d thought I wanted to be a knight, I thought I was ready, but nothing felt right. I didn’t know what to do so I just shut down, literally. I didn’t eat or sleep for days, it really freaked my family out,” he laughed softly.

Tommy looked at the older boy slightly horrified. He realized now that Dream had been only a few months older than Tommy was now when he’d been knighted. Tommy couldn’t fathom how terrifying it must have been for a younger Dream. The pressure of the kingdom on his back.

“Puffy was the one who found me, curled up in my room and completely unresponsive one day. It took them hours to get me to move. She called it a mental breakdown, I completely dissociated or something. After that, I came clean about all my fears and Puffy insisted I leave. I swear I never wanted to leave you, but I knew I was in no place to actually protect you.”

Tommy leaned slightly against the older and thought about what Dream had said earlier, ‘everyone needed a break sometimes’. He’d practically told Tommy what had happened and he hadn’t listened. “I’m sorry, big guy, I shouldn’t have said what I did, that sounds awful.”

Dream laughed, “Yeah it was, but it’s not your fault. You were a child and so was I. I just wish I realized how heavily my absence weighed on you. If I could go back in time, I’d take you with me.”

Tommy giggled, “Then you’d really be tried for treason.” Dream let out a loud wheeze. “Still, I’m sorry you had to go through that,” Tommy muttered into the older’s shoulder.

“Eh, it wasn’t all bad. I got the ship from Puffy and started adventuring. I met some of my best friends and earned some pretty sick scars, so I think it kind of evens out in the end.”

“That’s one way to look at it.”

“Shut up you gremlin,” Dream laughed and as ruffled Tommy’s hair. “I think Purpled wants to play with your sword,” he motioned towards a figuring blurring closer.

“I don’t think that means what you want it to mean,” Tommy smirked.

The knight groaned, “Stars above, not like that you cretin!”

“What’s a cretin?”

“Why don’t you leave me alone and go find out,” he smirked.

Tommy didn’t have time to reply before a purple blur knocked him off his feet. He tumbled to the ground, allowing the other blonde to pin him.

“Give me, give me, give me,” Purpled chanted as he wrestled for the broadsword.

“What’s the magic word,” Tommy sang.

“Shut up and hand it over,” Purpled shot back.

Tommy rolled his eyes but relinquished his hold right as his friend gave another sharp tug. Purpled went rolling backwards but still grinned, holding the weapon triumphantly. His friend took a moment to examine the sword in his hands before saying, “I’m so going to kick your ass with this!”

“Nope,” Punz suddenly appeared, plucking the sword from his brother’s hands. “You can play with daggers until I decide to teach you how to wield a sword and not lose a finger.”

“Ugh, you suck,” Purpled whined as Punz handed the weapon back over to Tommy.

“Don’t worry,” Tommy whispered. “Dream’s gonna teach me so then I can teach you and we can both chop off other people’s fingers.”

Purpled grinned at him and nodded excitedly. “Dream control your menace!” Punz grumbled.

“He’s just as much mine as he is yours, we’ve got shared custody,” Dream joked, ruffling Tommy’s hair.

“I guess so, he’s like the younger brother I always wanted,” Punz sighed wistfully.

“Hey, dickhead, I’m standing right here!” Purpled cried.

“Hmm, do you hear anything?” he turned to Tommy, ignoring Purpled who began throwing pebbles at them.

“No, must be a bug or something,” Tommy shrugged, grinning widely.

“You guys suck,” Purpled pouted.

“But you love us,” Tommy chirped.

“Yeah, I sadly do,” Purpled muttered.

Tommy's heart warmed at his friend's admittance. He hadn't realized how starved he'd been for affection before now. He'd gone so long with the barest hints of acknowledgment but now he'd finally found a family. One that he never wanted to run away from, one he would fight to stay by their side.

As he watched Dream and Punz chase Purpled around the empty street, he couldn't believe how lucky he'd gotten in life.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry school's been really busy but I'm trying to get these done chapters done when I can. Next chapter is gonna be really fun :) anyway hope you enjoyed!

something's gone terribly wrong

Chapter Summary

It appears that the royal family has finally realized something's afoot.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Today had been a good day for Phil. He'd spent the morning in the library with his oldest, pouring over trade disagreements. Then Techno was able to join him for lunch, which happened so rarely nowadays. Phil was even able to squeeze in some time to listen to Tubbo talk about his latest experiments. Yet no matter how good the day was, something felt off. Something had felt off for weeks but Phil couldn't quite put his finger on it.

He tried to brush aside the stone of dread that had made a home in his stomach, chalking it up to the paranoia of an old king. He busied himself with meetings and research but no matter what he did, he couldn't shake the wrongness that seemed to plague him. Even now as he sat in a meeting with the head of the merchant guild, his thoughts plagued him.

Had he forgotten a birthday? No, that wasn't it, they had just celebrated Wil's. Had he forgotten an important meeting? Surely one of his aides would have notified him!

Despite his restless thoughts, he tried to focus on the work in front of him. Even with Wilbur beginning to take on a larger portion of the paperwork, his attention was still demanded. He'd agreed to allow Wilbur to take the lead on most negotiations with the condition that he'd be present, just in case things got out of control.

So far Wil had done a wonderful job of not tearing the slimy merchant that served as guild master to pieces. This year the guild had decided to raise the minimum selling price of meat for the upcoming cold season. Everyone knew this would devastate the poorer districts and Phil refused to allow any of his people to go hungry this winter because they couldn't *afford meat*. The guild did not agree, hence the slimy merchant in his council room.

And while Wilbur may not have been actively trying to make the fat bastard shit himself, Phil could see his son was close to reaching his breaking point. “You must see that these increases are absurd,” Wilbur demanded.

The merchant wiped his brow with an already quite damp handkerchief. “Not at all, your highness! Last year we could get nearly double this if we wanted. The prices are set by the need, meat in the winter is scarce so people are willing to pay a higher price for it—”

“Are you trying to explain economics to me? Do you think me daft?” Wilbur’s tone was deadly.

“N-no, of course not, your highness,” the merchant stuttered. “I merely mean to say, meat costs more in the winter so we need to sell it at a higher price!”

His son scoffed, “You cannot be serious, last year you could only get those prices because of the shortages! If you raise them again the people will starve!”

“Well, we will starve if we lower our prices and sell at a loss. It’s just bad business!”

“Bad business my ass,” Wilbur muttered.

Phil figured now was as good a time as any to step in as any. “You simply cannot sell meat at this high of a minimum,” he could see the indignation in the merchant’s face and held a hand up to prevent him from breaking in. “The people will starve and you’ll still get no business. How about we work out a more reasonable price range for you to sell at and then you may send us your ledgers from the past five years. The crown will pay any outstanding losses. This way the people can have food and you can have your profits.”

The merchant wiped his brow once more before nodding. “I suppose that sounds fair. We’ll have to draw up a contract,” he sniffed.

“Of course,” Wilbur smiled sharply. “We’ll send it with a courier in a few weeks, you can send it back with any revisions and your ledger books.”

“Very well. Thank you, your highness,” the merchant nodded.

Phil stared at the merchant, waiting for him to excuse himself. When he made no move to do so, Phil sighed. “If that’s all you’re free to go. Oh, and please tell the guards to send in the next person on your way out,” he smiled but even he knew it looked strained.

“Of course, your majesty,” the man simpered, stumbling over his robes as he rose from his seat and waddled out of the room.

When the door closed behind him, Wilbur turned to him. “I hate that leech of a man,” his son sneered.

Phil let out a brief chuckle, “He is only one of thousands you will have to deal with. Better get used to it.” He clapped a hand to his son’s shoulder.

“Don’t remind me,” his son groaned.

“If he bothers you so much, you’re free to try and find someone as capable to replace him,” Phil offered.

Wilbur’s nose wrinkled in disgust, “I’m perfectly fine, thank you! Besides don’t we have servants for that sort of thing?”

“No, his position is one of utmost importance to the Empire’s economy. A role as large and important must be carefully decided, you know better,” he chided. “Besides a good king makes it his—”

“Business to be involved. Yes, I know,” Wilbur sighed but appeared sufficiently chastised.

As the door creaked open once more, he caught a glimpse of a familiar set of armor. His general was an uncommon sight in his council room. He was used to seeing her in front of a map with colorful flags on it, telling him where to move his soldiers. Nonetheless, he welcomed her into the space with a smile. He grinned as he caught his son's back straighten at the sight of Puffy. Phil laughed quietly to himself, it would seem Puffy had instilled a healthy amount of respect in each of his sons.

He motioned for her to move further into the room and noticed she was flanked by two younger knights. He took in her appearance, trying to gauge the news she was about to deliver. Puffy's grim expression was one he was familiar with, could almost count on, but the nervousness that seemed to flit through her eyes worried him. He'd only ever seen this look on his general twice before. Once as she led him to the body of his wife and the other when a rebel group had almost breached the castle.

He frowned, "What's wrong, Puffy?"

"Your highness, your majesty," she bowed quickly to them in turn, the knights behind her following in suit. "We can't find Prince Thomas."

Phil let himself relax. She'd truly had him concerned for a moment. "Puffy, you know Thomas. He's never where he's supposed to be. He's probably fallen asleep in the riding fields again."

Puffy pursed her lips and refused to meet Phil's eyes. "No, your majesty, we can't find him anywhere. We've searched the entire premise and his personal servant has said he hasn't been to the door in days."

"What?" the word slipped from Phil before he could stop it. The sheer disbelief he felt was crippling. There was no way Tommy was missing, they would have noticed. It was *Tommy*.

"That's impossible," Wilbur denied. "We would've noticed if Tommy's been gone for days! He's probably just trying to prank you."

Suddenly the odd feeling Phil had been feeling started to make sense and things began falling into place. The palace had been *quiet*. The palace was never quiet. Someone was always there screaming or laughing or chasing. But it had been eerily quiet recently as if something (*or someone*, his mind whispered) was missing.

As much as Phil wanted to agree with Wilbur, chalk everything up to some elaborate prank, he knew better. Something had happened to Tommy.

“When was he last seen?” Phil asked, voice gruff.

“Dad, come on! Tommy’s not missing, it’s *Tommy!*” Wilbur argued as if the fact that Tommy was Tommy meant the boy was invincible.

“Not now, Wilbur,” Phil snapped. “Puffy, when was the last time someone saw my son?”

Puffy shifted awkwardly, her eyes glancing everywhere in the room but to him. “It would seem a few of the kitchen staff were the last to see him, but that was nearly three weeks ago,” she finally answered.

“THREE WEEKS!” he roared. “My son has been missing for three weeks and somehow I was not made aware!”

He had never felt anger as raw as this. Tommy, his youngest, was gone and no one had noticed. He ignored the insidious, little voice in the back of his mind telling him that he too hadn’t noticed. He was busy, he was king for stars sake! He couldn’t always be aware of all his sons at every given moment. *But three weeks is a long time to remain unaware*, the voice hissed.

And it wasn’t wrong, three weeks *was* a long time. Long enough for a kidnapper to be clear of the Empire’s land, long enough for his son to have been k—*no!* Tommy would be fine, he had to be. They’d find him and everything would be fine, he reassured himself.

“Have there been any ransom notes?” he asked stiffly.

Puffy shook her head, “No, we haven’t received any correspondences regarding the young prince.”

Phil nodded, “Right, well we still can’t rule out foul play.”

“How could no one have noticed?” Wilbur interrupted. “You say he’s been gone three weeks? That’s a long time for no one to notice.”

Phil agreed, again how had no one noticed?

Puffy grimaced, “Apparently, his tutors have become so accustomed to his truancy they hadn’t felt the need to bother you with his absence. Beyond them, he doesn’t see anyone else in the palace regularly.”

That couldn’t be possible. Surely Thomas had duties and practices that he’d had to attend weekly. And family dinners! Phil had a sickening realization, Tommy had stopped coming to family dinners. At first, they’d all thought he’d been upset about the argument, and eventually they’d just grown accustomed to the empty seat. Phil had another sickening realization, the last words he’d said to his son were that of anger.

He pushed down his thoughts, he needed to be rational now. There was no point in grieving yet. He pushed forward with his questions, “What about welding trainers or advisors? He’s friends with the servants, isn’t he? What about his personal servant?”

“As I said, the kitchen staff was the last to see him. Michael is only responsible for bringing Tommy clothes and meals. He says he notified the staff matron when Tommy first stopped answering the door but she hadn’t thought to tell anyone else about it.”

“Fire her, the tutors too, I should be kept in the loop about my own children’s whereabouts,” Phil declared.

“Who's Michael?” Wilbur asked, his voice thoughtful.

“His personal servant, your highness,” Puffy informed him.

Phil found himself surprised at the information. He hadn't known his own son's personal servant? He knew that Wilbur had Fundy and Tubbo had Ranboo, hell even Techno had that Squid kid for if he wanted a servant for the day. But Tommy's servant had always escaped his memory till now. And this Michael apparently only brought him clothes. Personal servants were meant to be companions more than servants. Being royalty could be stressful, even lonely at times, so personal servants were there to lighten the burdens. It would seem Tommy hadn't had this help and Phil had been none the wiser.

He knew he never spent enough time with his youngest son but since when had it turned into this kind of neglect?

“Someone get Techno, tell him to meet us in the west library. And send someone to tell Tubbo what is happening. For now we need to increase security, make sure none of the princes walk without a guard,” Phil ordered.

Puffy motioned for the two knights behind her to carry out his orders. They quickly bowed before disappearing out the doorway. She turned back to Phil as they left sight, wearing a solemn expression, and said, “This is my fault, your majesty. I was entrusted with the safekeeping of the royal family and it's clear I've neglected my duties. I'm formally offering my resignation—”

“Don't be foolish,” he hissed. “I need you now more than ever! How will we be able to find Tommy without you?”

“But—”

“Please, I refuse to lose another member of my family today.”

She seemed taken aback for a moment before nodding, “As you wish, your highness. We should act fast then, we haven’t any time to lose.”

“Right, well we told Techno to meet us in the library so I suppose we should head over there now.”

“Of course, I’ll lead the way,” Puffy agreed.

“Techno’s going to hate all the guards,” Wilbur smirked.

Phil snorted and even Puffy let out an amused huff. *Yes, his middle child did hate to be babied*, but he wouldn’t risk any of his sons right now.

When they arrived, they each began pulling out maps and guard rosters. Puffy showed him the current guard schedules and explained how they might be able to fit in an extra rotation. Phil could only half focus on her words, busy imagining the horrible fates that might have befallen his youngest. *How could he have been so careless?* He couldn’t imagine what his wife would have thought of him now.

“Your majesty?” Puffy broke him from his thoughts.

“Hmm,” he hummed, having missed her question.

“I was telling you that my sons have returned, they could be of help,” she offered.

“Dream’s back?” Wilbur gaped.

“Yes, he’s decided that he’s ready to be of service again,” Puffy smiled but it was strained.

Wilbur gave an embarrassed nod, the subject of her youngest son had always been a sore spot for Puffy. Phil knew she was immensely proud of the boy, so was he which was why he'd allowed for the leave of absence, but what had happened all those years ago had truly frightened the woman.

"I'll take all the help I can get but I don't want to push him too far too quickly," Phil told her.

Puffy waved a hand, "He's one of the most talented hunters we've got, it'd be a shame to waste him. I'd rather him by my side than fighting in those stupid league matches," Puffy huffed.

Phil understood the sentiment, when he'd learned of Techno's more aggressive past times he'd been upset too. It was no secret league matches were dangerous and dirty things, they could hardly even be considered a sport. Still, Techno found they calmed the voices and so Phil had indulged him, as long as his son's status remained a secret.

"Besides, he'd want to help Tommy," Puffy sounded confident. "He's got some pretty powerful friends too who can lend a hand."

Phil thought for a moment before agreeing, "Okay, send for him. Tell him that we need his help but don't tell him what's happening, I don't want to run the risk of anything getting intercepted."

Puffy gave a sharp nod and quickly marched out of the room, presumably to write a letter for her son. Phil sighed, Dream probably wouldn't come until the morning and he hated wasting any time. Each second his son's life might hang in the balance. He returned to the books in front of him, trying to busy his hands and mind.

The library had fallen silent after Puffy left, and despite that being the usual state it unnerved him. It was further reminder of his missing son. If Tommy was here, Phil was sure he'd be yelling and chasing the spiders across the room.

Wilbur sat silently at the end of one of the long tables and watched as Phil paced its length. The crown prince couldn't find the right emotion to feel in this moment. A part of him still

believed Tommy was playing some sort of joke on them to get back at them for their lack of attention recently. He'd always been clingy like that. He would whine for days if Wilbur had forgotten to find him after his lessons to play. But he should've come out by now, laughing about how stupid they looked running around.

Wilbur just couldn't fathom the idea that his Tommy, his sunshine, had disappeared. Stars, if their mother could see him now. She'd be so disappointed. He'd allowed his studies and duties to get in the way of spending time with Tommy. He'd see how his brother's hopeful smiles would always fall when Wilbur brushed off spending time together. He knew Tommy missed them, he knew Tommy had felt isolated and he'd still done nothing. Now, Tommy was missing and he hadn't noticed! How had their lives become so separated?

The silence was broken by the large oak doors of the library being thrown open. Phil paused his pacing and watched as Wilbur also stilled in his seat. In strode his middle child, Techno looking every part of the terrifying general his reputation spoke of. His red paludamentum flowing behind him with each step. The long sword on his waist nearly touched the floor.

"Why are the knights telling me Tommy's gone missing?" his son's voice carried clear and precise across the foyer, his monotone voice edging towards anger. Phil fought the urge to shrink away from the angry warrior.

Technoblade had always had a soft spot for his littlest brother, his own Prometheus. He was always willing to entertain the blonde's endless ramblings. In return his brother had spent countless nights with him, listening to Techno tell the stories hidden amongst the stars. Sure, in recent years those nights had become few and far between but that didn't mean he ever stopped treasuring those moments. He couldn't help he'd become so busy, dealing with the weight of training to be the future general. He had to be perfect in order to keep this Empire safe, to keep his family safe. What a wonderful job he'd done of that if Tommy really was gone like the guards had said.

"No one has seen him for weeks," Phil informed the young general. "I was just informed this morning."

He watched the emotions flit through Techno's eyes: shock, disbelief, realization, anger, and finally acceptance.

“Since the dinner?” Techno asked, finally drawing closer to the table.

He’d made the same connection as Phil had, the last time any of them had seen Tommy was that dreadful family dinner. Phil nodded.

“And there’s been no notes or anything of the sort to indicate he’s been kidnapped?” Technoblade continued.

“Correct.”

“So we can’t rule out he’s left of his own accord,” his voice was quiet.

Phil froze, he hadn’t even considered Tommy might’ve run away. He quickly shook his head, “Tommy’s never been into the city before, at least not past the ceremonial grounds. He wouldn’t be able to stay in the city for three weeks unaccompanied.”

“He’s right,” Wilbur nodded. “Tommy doesn’t even understand how money works. He wouldn’t last a day before coming back home!”

“We both know Tommy is nothing if resourceful. Even you call him a raccoon all the time,” Techno motioned towards the crown prince.

“Yeah, but there’s no fucking way Tommy wouldn’t have come back by now!”

“Boys!” Phil scolded. “Arguing will get us nowhere. Whether or not Tommy has left of his own volition or not doesn’t matter, what we need to focus on is getting him back.”

Both boys ducked their heads with mumbled apologies. Techno cleared his throat, “Right, well we should increase the guards patrolling the streets. Give them each some photos of Tommy and tell them to keep an eye out.”

“We should keep this discreet,” Wilbur cut in. “If Tommy really did choose to leave then we don’t want to put a target on his back. Besides, it’ll be easier to find him if no one knows we’re looking.”

“Right, we’ll put a few new guards into the city rotation to keep an eye out for Tommy. Puffy will make sure they know to be discreet,” Phil nodded.

“We should also send in a spy or two out, just to see what’s been stirring,” Techno added.

Wilbur began scribbling words onto the page in front of him. “Okay, so we’re sending in more guards, a spy, and we still need to interview the kitchen staff,” he read off the list he’d created.

Before Phil could respond, the doors flew open once more. In rushed a familiar blur of green and brown followed by another black and white blur. Phil sighed, this was not going to end well.

The blur skidded to a stop in front of the king. “Where is he,” Tubbo demanded.

His servant crashed into Tubbo’s back, unprepared for the sudden stop. At any other moment, Phil would have laughed but he was not in a laughing mood right now. Ranboo quickly righted himself and situated himself warily behind the prince.

A guard raced in a moment later, breathing heavily. “I—I’m sorr—sorry, your ma—jesty. I tried to—stop him,” the guard panted.

Phil waved the man away. He knew better than anyone, when Tubbo wanted something, he’d get it.

“Tubbo, what did you need?” he asked, careful to keep his voice stern but not unkind.

“What do I need? What do *I need*?” his son screeched. *Stars, that kid had a pair of lungs on him.* “I want to know where Tommy is so I can strangle him. He just got the guards to try and convince me he’s gone missing.”

Phil grimaced, so Tubbo was taking this just about as well as he expected. “I’m afraid it wasn’t a prank.”

Tubbo stared at him for a moment before doubling over with laughter. “How—did he—convince you—to help—him,” Tubbo wheezed between laughs. Ranboo shifted anxiously, obviously the servant had caught onto the tense atmosphere.

He saw out of the corner of his eyes, Wilbur and Techno exchanging wary looks. This wasn’t ideal. “Tubbo, we’re not joking. Tommy’s gone missing. No one’s seen him in weeks.”

The young prince’s gaze moved between the older three, searching for deception. When he couldn’t find it, he let out a quiet gasp. “No, no! He’s here, he was to be!” The boy began looking around as if Tommy was waiting in the shadows to jump out and scare him.

Tommy couldn’t be gone, Tubbo would not allow it. He owed that boy more than his life, Tommy had given Tubbo a future. Tubbo had been so worried Tommy thought he’d only used the younger for his crown. He hated the confused frown that seemed to always find itself on the youngest prince’s lips when Tubbo was around. Tubbo had tried to distance himself, allow Tommy time to understand the changes, but then he’d met Ranboo and he’d started lessons and suddenly he found himself so busy. He barely had time for meals anymore, let alone walks in the gardens with Tommy. Now though, it felt as if he’d wasted all that time he spent away from Tommy. His oldest friend, his brother, was gone now and somehow he hadn’t realized.

When the guards had told him Tommy was missing, he’d been so sure it was some cruel joke his brother was playing on him for continuously ditching him. His first instinct was to get angry at Tommy, his shenanigans had interrupted his latest experiment. Now, Tubbo wanted to kick himself.

Phil could see the agony blazing through the young boy. He pulled the boy into a hug, “It’ll be okay,” he whispered. “We’ll find him, we’ll get our Tommy back.”

Techno cleared his throat, causing the father and son to part. “We need to finalize our plans with Puffy.”

“Tubbo stick by Ranboo, if Tommy was kidnapped, we don’t want to risk anything happening again,” Wilbur instructed.

Tubbo frowned, “What do you mean, if? What else could have happened?”

The three adults exchanged weary glances. Finally, Phil answered, “We think it’s possible, however unlikely, that Tommy may have chosen to leave of his own accord.”

“Like he ran away?” Ranboo spoke up, wincing as soon as he realized he’d spoken aloud. “Sorry, your majesties.”

Phil waved his apology away, “Yes, we think he might have run away.”

Tubbo shook his head furiously. “No, he would never leave us! Why would you even think that?” Tubbo demanded, tears in his eyes. “We’re his family!”

“Do you remember that dinner a few weeks ago?” Wilbur asked gently.

The young prince went quiet, trying to recall the dinner in question. His face smoothed over in realization. “When you guys fought?” Techno nodded. “But that was weeks ago? And it was hardly a fight, why would he leave because of that?”

“We don’t know, he seemed pretty upset but honestly, we’re pretty clueless right now. All I know is that we *are* going to figure it out and we will bring Tommy home. I promise,” Phil swore.

Tubbo looked down, clearly ashamed of something. "I haven't talked to him ages, I can't believe I hadn't noticed he was gone," the prince admitted.

"I've been neglecting my Tommy time as well," Wilbur whispered. "I can't even remember the last time I was alone with him."

Techno didn't speak but Phil could see the regret filling his son. They'd all been neglecting their youngest. Even him, *especially him*, he couldn't even remember the last time he'd had a conversation with his youngest that wasn't scolding. He was an awful father.

"I think we all could have treated Tommy better, but we can't change the past. We can only apologize for it and look to the future to do better. When Tommy is brought back, then we can show him how truly sorry we are. He'll never be alone again," Phil looked at his sons, each nodding.

They would never lose their Tommy again, Phil would fight life and limb for his kid. He was done trying to ignore his past, it was about time for him to grow the fuck up.

He would get his son back, no matter what it took.

Chapter End Notes

I had to do it, I just had to. Have a little angst and a whole lotta regrets. I'm trying really hard to make the royals redeemable but it does feel a bit forced idk. hope yall liked it :)

not quite regret but something similar

Chapter Summary

Tommy meets Karl, thinks about life, runs from some guards, and starts his training montage.

Chapter Notes

enjoy some fluff and a medium length chapter as apologies for my absence :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Niki had given him the morning off while explaining something about a festival in the evening and picking out outfits. Truth be told, Tommy hadn't been listening very closely but in his defense, he'd been busy thinking about his first training session with Dream that afternoon.

Still, he managed to catch that Niki would be out of the bakery that morning and he'd have free reign over the apartment. He'd tried to sleep in once he'd learned that he wasn't going to be allowed in the kitchens without Niki present, but he still found himself waking up with the sun.

Tommy groaned, it would be hours before Purpled would be willing to meet up and Hannah would probably still be asleep, even Sam would be busy getting his forge running for the day. He had nothing to do. Looking around the apartment in the hopes to find some sort of entertainment, his eyes landed on an old scroll of paper Niki had left out that morning.

Stars above! He'd completely forgotten about the scroll Skeppy had given him. He quickly scrambled over the couch and dug out said scroll from the side table. He yanked it free with a victorious shout and began unfurling it.

As he read through the document, he was reminded why he'd put it away in the first place. He could hardly read the ancient, swirling letters. He knew he should've paid more attention

in his Emperian lessons, but the language was so stuffy and *boring*.

From what he could gather from the little he knew of Emperian and the few pictures dotting the page, the scroll had something to do with wielding and gemstones. He couldn't quite understand the connections.

Tommy sighed, he needed to figure out how to translate it. The city library was probably a good place to start. Skeppy had said something about a library in town and someone named Karl. He laughed at the thought of spending his entire morning in a library, oh how proud Technoblade would be of him.

But, alas, there was nothing better to do, he decided and so he made his way towards the front door. Before he left, he made sure to bundle up properly. It had been getting cold recently, winter fully setting in, and Niki had brought a thick fur-lined cloak home with her a few days ago. And while it was nowhere near as nice as his one in the palace, he knew it must have cost a few gold pieces. He'd tried to protest, or at least pay her, but she refused. She called it 'compensation' for his hours in the kitchen.

Every time he wore it, he felt a rush of warmth knowing how thoughtful she was. He had really gotten lucky here. Grinning as he gripped the red fabric tighter, he began to head out into the city.

From his brief geography lessons, he knew the library was in the middle of the city, or somewhere around there. And thankfully, Niki's bakery was only a few blocks away from the central plaza. An area Tommy had been through only a few times before during the early days of traveling between the market and the castle and then once more with Purpled weeks earlier when they hiked up to Ponk's place.

The area was nicer than the market square but not as pretty as the main square. It was more of a shopping district than anything else, with stores and restaurants that lined one large road and catered to residents of both the upper and lower districts.

Though it was uncommon to see anyone from the lower half of the city shopping around the plaza. Usually, if you were from the lower districts, you could get anything you needed from the markets.

In actuality, the plaza was less a plaza and more a long rectangle that cut the city in half. Above it lay the nicer housing districts, like the main square, and a few museums along with most of the specialty shops. Below the plaza was home to the lower classes. It was mostly composed of rundown houses and grimy taverns.

Tommy had never visited the plaza before, only passed through. Still, he couldn't help but find himself relaxing into the clean streets and bright colors. It had been a while since he'd allowed himself to experience this sort of wealth. As much as he despised it, there was always that traitorous part of his brain that missed the soft silk shirts and endless amounts of food. He never trusted himself enough to venture anywhere near the plaza, afraid he'd become *homesick*.

Yet here he was., staring at the ladies in flowing skirts and the ornate carriages that lined the streets. And just as he feared, Tommy felt himself missing his old room with its pointlessly large bed and the long, carpeted corridors he'd once wandered.

He watched as two boys across the street chased each other around their mother, laughing and jeering. He was hit was a wave of longing for his own brothers, not the ones he'd left behind but the ones he'd grown up with. His skin felt hot and tight, and he realized he was close to tears. Quickly he wiped at his face as he turned away from the boys, shaking away the longing.

He had a new bed, or well couch, and he'd gotten a new family. Purpled was his brother and nothing would change that. Punz, Dream, Niki they were his and he was theirs. He never had to worry about being loved anymore (even if he did some days because he knew how hard it was to love him).

He shoved his thoughts into an empty space in the back of his mind and began to search for the library. He hoped it wouldn't be hard to find. Skeppy said it was in the middle of the city somewhere so, theoretically, as long as he wandered up and down the plaza he should find it eventually.

Theoretically.

In reality, it wasn't quite that easy. The plaza was a good 2 miles long and Tommy didn't fancy spending a few hours walking just to learn about a star's forsaken scroll. So, he came up with a much easier plan, ask the next person he runs into for directions.

That also was not as easy as he was expecting. Mainly because the first three people he'd run into hadn't actually answered him, just stared at him with thinly veiled disgust before stepping around him. One man had the audacity to ask if he even knew how to read! As if Tommy, a prince, was illiterate. Sure, he probably needed a bath and a new pair of pants but that didn't give the dude any right to be an asshole.

The whole experience was a bittersweet reminder that he was, for all intents and purposes, no longer a prince. He'd gotten everything he'd wanted and he refused to regret leaving, but he did miss the convenience of being a prince. If he was still Prince Thomas then he wouldn't have even needed to go to the city library, he could have just asked one of his tutors to translate the scroll for him.

But he wasn't Prince Thomas anymore, he was Tommy and Tommy had to find the library like a normal person. So, he grit his teeth and tapped on a lady's shoulder.

"Hello, Miss," Tommy greeted as politely as he could muster.

She turned and Tommy was distantly reminded of Fundy. She had the boy's fiery orange hair and the smile she wore was sharp but it seemed to soften when she saw him, "Oh, hello there! Can I help you?"

Well, she didn't seem disgusted or angered at his presence so good start.

"I was wondering if you could point me in the direction of the library?"

She giggled slightly and it reminded him vaguely of a dolphin. "Sure, it's right over there," she pointed across the street to a rather large stone building.

Tommy bit back a groan. No wonder people thought he couldn't read; he'd missed the very large letters carved into the building's front that spelled out 'P U B L I C L I B R A R Y'.

Today was just not his day.

"Oh, thanks," he chuckled awkwardly, scratching the back of his neck.

"Of course," the lady smiled.

"Well, I'm just gonna... ya' know," he muttered as he stumbled backward towards the street.

He turned away as quickly as he could but not before he caught her laughing. His cheeks were burning red with embarrassment. *Stars, Techno did always say he needed to be more observant. At least he could talk to strangers without having a panic attack, hah take that Technolame!*

For a moment he paused at the bottom of the steps leading up to the library, just taking in the grand stature of the thing. The building was huge and Tommy could see that the large columns were carved with spiraling letters from an alphabet he didn't recognize. Soon enough the awe passed and started to climb the stairs.

Tommy was proud to say he was only slightly winded as he reached the top. As he stood at the top, he noticed that there was no one coming or going from the building. One of the doors had been cracked open but he couldn't hear anything from inside, not even the sound of pages turning. *Maybe there are just too many stairs*, he thought snidely. But Tommy was nothing if not stubborn so, undeterred by the lack of life, he slipped inside.

The interior was just as large and grand as the outside. There was a wall of windows on one side, allowing the morning light to filter into the room. He noticed one of the windows was made completely of stained glass. The glass formed a scene of a man kneeling before a column of light. He recognized the scene from his time in the Temple of Lunar. It was depicting when the First Emperor was blessed by the Morning Star for returning the lost Nether Star. It had been Tommy's favorite story to hear on temple visits.

He smiled softly to himself at the memories. He'd always liked spending his off days hiding in the temple, staring at the pretty windows and listening to the clerics teach. Tommy ignored the sharp pang of longing that struck him. The Temple of Lunar was nestled amongst the palace grounds, he would never be able to go back.

It was just another part of his life he'd traded away and while he allowed himself to miss it, that was no longer his life. Besides his new life was great! Still, the bitter taste in his mouth did not fade. He turned back to the stained glass. He wondered if the First Emperor ever felt like this, satisfied with his new life but still clinging to old memories. Sometimes it felt like for so long all Tommy had had were those old memories and it was becoming impossible to give them up.

"Hello," a soft voice startled him from his thoughts.

Tommy whirled around to come face to face with a rather timid-looking man. He was a few inches shorter than Tommy, so much so that Tommy found himself looking down slightly to meet his eyes, and Tommy could see the sharp just of elbows and knees beneath the man's clothes. *Jeez, he was almost as lanky as Tommy was.* The man's blue, high-colored coat was reminiscent of what the royal librarians wore, just minus the fancy decorations.

He wasn't looking at Tommy but rather past him, towards the windows. He wore an odd look, almost reminiscent.

"I see you've found our sanctuary," the man smiled softly. "I've always loved how the morning rays pass through, turns the entire lounge orange."

"Yeah, it's wonderful," Tommy nodded, shifting awkwardly.

"My name is Karl," the man—Karl said. "I'm one of the timekeepers here."

So, this is who Skeppy sent him to find, but also, "What the fuck's a timekeeper?"

Karl giggled, “Timekeepers keep the time.” Tommy shot him the blankest look he could manage. “Right, well, basically we watch and record time as it happens and review other timekeepers’ works.”

“So, a historian?” Tommy was wildly confused.

Karl laughed, “Sure, close enough.”

Why had Skeppy sent him here? This librarian dude was clearly off his rocker. Tommy sighed, this was going to be a long morning. He glanced around subtly, hoping to find someone else who might be able to help him. After a moment he realized the library was empty. Tommy didn’t see another soul in sight.

“Where is everyone?” he asked.

Karl glanced around pouting as if he too was just realizing they were alone. “Everyone’s probably busy getting ready for the Spring Festival tonight.”

Oh, he realized, that’s what Niki was talking about earlier. He’d completely forgotten about the Spring Festival. It was so strange too, usually the festival was his favorite event of the year.

The Spring Festival was held at the end of the spring season as a way for people to celebrate the end of the harvest season and the beginning of winter. People exchanged small gifts and there was a parade of actors dressed as the four seasons that waltzed through the city acting out old legends.

Though Tommy’s favorite part was the food. The festival was one of the few times in the year Tommy got to leave the palace and he took full advantage of it. He’d roam the ceremonial grounds right outside the palace grounds, toeing the line between safety and freedom, talking to the vendors that lined the streets, and sneaking treats. His favorite were

the golden apples, which were regular apples dipped in caramel and sprinkled with golden foil and named after their magical look-a-likes.

He would always come back to the palace hours later with a sticky grin and caramel-coated hands. Techno would joke that he was surprised all of Tommy's teeth hadn't rotted away from the sugar. Tommy would just shoot him a grin that was more teeth than lips just to prove him wrong.

But it had been years since he'd actually attended the festivities in the city. His mom used to take all of them into the plaza to watch the parade but after she was gone, Phil had never bothered to.

Distantly he wondered if Niki would need his help baking anything for the festivities that evening. Surely, she'd be going out if she was getting a new dress. He should probably get everyone a gift for the winter.

An awkward cough brought Tommy out of his thoughts. "Can I help you with something?" the historian asked him.

"Yeah, Skeppy sent me over here with this," Tommy quickly pulled the scroll out from beneath his coat. "He said you could help me read it."

Karl extended an open palm towards him and Tommy hesitantly dropped the scroll into it. The historian gently unfurled the paper and took a moment to scan its contents. When he looked back up at Tommy his brows had furrowed, it was by far the least happy expression he'd seen the man make so far. He bit back an excuse to grab the scroll and bolt as he waited for a response.

The historian hummed, eyes darting across lines of text. "This is Ancient Emperian."

It wasn't a question but Tommy still answered, "Yeah, I know it's got something to do with wielding theory but I couldn't figure out much more than a few words."

The historian glanced up again briefly with a raised eyebrow, “I’m surprised you could figure out anything, not many people are well versed in the ancient tongues.”

“My father made me learn,” he explained, trying to recall the excuse he’d given Skeppy all those weeks ago. “He was an adventurer, said Emperian helped him out on the road and we should all learn it.”

Nailed it.

“An adventurer,” Karl hummed. “What did you say your name was, again?”

Okay, so maybe he didn’t nail it.

“Uh, Tommy—” *lie, lie, lie*, “Danger?”

The librarian promptly slapped a hand across his mouth as his shoulders began to shake. Now, Tommy wasn’t positive Karl bought the lie but the man seemed too busy trying to stifle his own laughter to question Tommy’s incredible last name. That works for him

Once the man had regained control over himself, he smiled politely. “Forgive me, I didn’t mean to laugh. That’s a very honorable last name, I’m sure you’re incredibly proud to have it.”

“Yup,” Tommy nodded. “Can we get back to the scroll, please?”

“Right, of course!” Karl clapped his hands. “I almost forgot! Well, follow me.” The man motioned towards Tommy as he quickly turned on his heel.

Tommy trailed behind Karl as the historian weaved through towering bookcases. He managed to catch a few of the titles as he passed. “The Benefits of Fermented Spider Eyes” and “Enchanting Thorns: A Master’s Guide” both made him shiver. He remembered the prickly

enchantment from when he'd punched Techno with his battle armor on. It had only been a light sting but the pain had lingered for hours.

Eventually, the titles changed from the eclectic to something more boring. Tommy had to stifle a yawn just read the spine of "A Brief History of the Empire's Greatest Conquests". As they passed another bookcase, Karl abruptly stopped and knelt down. Tommy nearly tripped over the man, cursing quietly as he righted himself.

Karl ignored him in favor of pulling out a few books, each thicker than the last. Tommy nearly groaned at the sight of them. They looked like something his tutors would fawn over. Tommy made a face when Karl handed him, "The Beginnings of Ancient Emperian".

Karl must have seen him because he laughed softly. "Don't worry, I'll be doing most of the reading," he reassured Tommy.

"You better be bitch!"

Finally, Karl decided they had enough books and instructed Tommy to follow him to one of the tables. They both carried their precarious stacks of books back towards to glass windows.

Upon arrival, Karl dumped his stack onto a small side table and nestled into one of the big, overstuffed chairs. Tommy quickly joined him in a similar chair beside the librarian.

"I figured these are more comfortable than the tables and we'll probably be here for a while, so," Karl trailed off.

Tommy nodded, it was nicer to sit here than in one of the stone chairs. Tommy watched quietly as Karl thumbed through one of the books. The librarian muttered incoherently as he turned the pages. Tommy fidgeted in his seat, a bit unsure of what he should be doing.

"Uh, Karl?" Karl's eyes didn't raise from the book in his lap but he gave a questioning hum. "What can I do?"

Karl's head popped up. "Oh, right! Look through these and see if you can find any mention of magical texts," he motioned towards the stack of books in front of them. "From what I can tell, you're right that the scroll is about wielding so we probably won't be able to pull out an Emperian dictionary and do direct translations. There's going to be a lot more technical and obscure terms."

Tommy groaned, he certainly was right, *this was going to be a long morning.*

A few hours in and Tommy was cursing every scholar and historian out there for not creating a magical terms encyclopedia for Ancient Emperian. Seriously, every time he found some sort of passage about wielding or anything magic-related in the old empire they always skirted around terminology. Karl didn't seem to be having much fun either.

The librarian pushed a fourth book off to the side, sighing slightly. "I hope you're having better luck than me," he huffed.

Tommy shook his head, still trying to get through his second book (something incredibly boring about old flame wielders). "I think we might have better luck trying to get an ice seal to read it!"

Karl snorted, "Yeah, I forgot how secretive the old Empire could be with magic."

"If only we could get one of those old bastards to look at it and just tell us what it says," Tommy sighed.

Karl snapped his fingers, "That's it! You're a genius!"

"Of course I am," Tommy agreed. "How am I a genius?"

"We'll get someone who speaks Emperian to translate it for us!"

“But, uh, how are we going to find someone who speaks Emperian?”

“I may know a few people,” Karl shrugged. “Give me a day and I can probably get it done, if not I’ve got a friend in the city pretty well versed in ancient languages.”

“Wait so we just wasted the past four hours trying to read this damn scroll, when you know someone who can actually just read it!”

Karl looked away and grinned impishly, “Well it’s all complicated! And, honestly, I’d completely forgotten about Foolish since they’ve just only come back to the city recently. Foolish is great though, super smart!”

“Wait, Foolish like Dream’s brother?”

“You know Dream?”

“Yeah, he’s friend’s with Punz!”

“You know Punz?” Karl seemed incredibly confused. “I thought you said Skeppy sent you?”

“He did but I’m friends with Purpled and I totally beat the shit out of Punz when we first met!” Tommy laughed.

“Oh stars, did he try to do the ‘are you good enough to be friends with my brother?’ challenge?”

“Yep, tried to mug me in an alleyway but I showed him! Trapped him in dirt and made him eat shit” Tommy smiled broadly.

Karl laughed, hitting the table as he did so. “No way, I can’t wait to see him again I’m never going to let him live this down!”

“Wait, how do you know Punz?”

Karl blushed, “Well you know Sapnap?”

“Only a bit,” he shrugged. “Short, dark-haired flame wielder?”

Karl snorted at the description, “Yeah, him. We’re engaged.” Karl extended a hand, showing off a golden band on one of his fingers.

Tommy gaped for a moment, “Wow, that’s—wow! I didn’t know he was even dating anyone.”

“Yeah, we like to keep it subtle, we’re both really busy,” Karl shrugged. “Besides he only proposed a few weeks ago so I don’t think anyone really knows yet.”

“Well, congrats big man!” Tommy smiled.

Karl coughed, cheeks bright red. “Thanks! We should—”

Whatever Karl was about to say next was caught off by the resounding crack of the library doors. Tommy turned in his seat to see what the commotion was. He was surprised to find a familiar knight dressed in very formal court attire, huffing as if he had just run a marathon.

“Tommy, where have you been all morning?” Dream gasped out.

“Here, with Karl.” The librarian waved.

“No one knew where you were, why didn’t you say something? What have you even been doing?”

“Uh, what do you think? I’ll give you one guess,” Tommy motioned to the stack of books beside him.

“We need to go, like now,” Dream growled as he pulled Tommy out of the seat— and woah when had Dream gotten so close?

“Alright, jeez! Chill, I’m coming!” Tommy stumbled trying to keep up with Dream. He turned to Karl slightly, “I’ll meet you here, tomorrow morning?”

Karl nodded but shot a concerned look towards the two of them. But they were out the door before the historian could say anything else. Dream didn’t stop pulling him until they reached the bottom of the stairs, ignoring all of his questions.

When he tried to speak, Dream simply shushed him and pointed towards something down the street. As he looked at what Dream was pointing to, Tommy caught sight of two pairs of guards on either side of the street. They seemed to just be watching the crowds but when they looked in their direction, Dream cursed. The knight quickly yanked him into the nearest alleyway.

“Dream, what is going on?” Tommy pleaded.

The knight sighed, slowing his pace for a moment. “I was summoned to the palace this morning,” Tommy gasped softly, “Your father has realized you’re missing. Though he seems to think you’ve been kidnapped and he’s asked for my help in finding you.”

Tommy snorted, “You going to turn me in, big man?”

“This isn’t a joke,” Dream hissed, “From now on, anyone caught hiding you could be executed!”

Tommy flinched at the older’s harsh words. He never wanted anyone to get hurt because of him, he just wanted a bit of freedom. Tears began to form and he tried his hardest to blink them away.

The knight sighed, “I’m sorry, Toms, I was too harsh. I just wanted you to understand the severity of this.”

Tommy nodded, “I’m sorry, I should’ve known better,” he sniffed. “But we can go back now if you think that’s best.” He hung his head low. He’d rather go back to an empty palace than see anything bad happen to Purpled or Niki.

“Oh, Tommy, no,” Dream pulled him into a tight embrace. “You’re not going back there unless you want to.”

“But you said people could be executed!”

“We all knew the risks and decided to help you, we’re not turning our backs on you now!” Dream reassured him.

“Promise?”

“Promise, we’re family now,” Dream pulled away and ruffled his hair. “But right now, we need to focus on getting away from all these guards.”

Together they weaved through back alleys and side streets, occasionally ducking into small alcoves to hide from guards. Eventually, they made it back into the lower districts and the

extra guards seemed to dissipate. However, instead of heading towards Niki's or the market, Dream led him towards the other side of the city.

“Where are we going?” Tommy asked him.

“The League Arena,” came the knight’s quick response, his head swiveling back and forth on the lookout for more guards.

Shouldn’t they be trying to find Sapnap or Punz and figure out some sort of plan?

“Why aren’t we meeting up with the others?” he voiced his confusion.

Dream laughed, “Right now we need to lay low. The last thing we should be doing is hosting large clandestine meetings about what we should do with the missing prince.”

That was probably fair. “Okay, so why are we going to the Arena? I don’t think we should be wasting time watching matches.”

“It’s not even midday,” Dream scoffed. “No matches are even going on. Besides I told you we were going to train, did I not?”

Tommy grinned, unable to contain his excitement. He could still remember that first league match between the Yellow Yaks and the Dream Team. The way Dream had been able to manipulate his element left Tommy breathless. He’d never seen anyone able to wield so seamlessly before. And now he was going to learn from Dream!

This was going to be amazing!

This sucked, Tommy thought to himself as he ducked another pocket of debris-filled air. Kicking up a cloud of dust and rock, only to send them hurling towards Tommy with a gust of wind seemed to be one of Dream's favorite tricks. It was dirty and underhanded, and Tommy *loved* it.

Though the pro wielder seemed to rely as much on his petty tricks as he did his actual skill. His wielding technique was smooth and fluid, all of his movements held a certain amount of grace. Tommy could get lost watching Dream change from one form to the next as if it was as easy as breathing. Perhaps it was to him.

It was as if Dream was a dancer and the arena was his stage. Tommy was no dancer, so far that much was clear. He knew he lacked a lot of the formal training he should have had by now (turns out bailing on wielding lessons did have consequences after all, *damnit*). That didn't mean Tommy wasn't able to hold his own. Besides Tommy was less interested in learning the pretty, flowy wind forms and more focused on actually learning how to *fight*. Dream could be a dancer all he wanted, Tommy would be a warrior.

As he ducked out of the way of another burst of air, he created a small dip in the ground right behind Dream's back foot. When he'd fully righted himself again, Tommy shot off a few disks of earth. The older man stepped backward in an attempt to dodge the attack and tripped right into the ditch. The man went sprawling on his back, groaning as he hit his head.

Tommy cackled loudly as Dream shot him a hard look. "You cheated," Dream stated from the ground.

"Where's the evidence?" Tommy smirked.

"I believe I'm sitting in it," Dream said as he motioned around at the uneven ground.

"Looks normal to me," Tommy shrugged.

"It was smart," Dream conceded, standing up and brushing off his clothes, "But you would get disqualified in a league match, you can't mess with the elements on this side."

“Mimimimimi I’m Dream and I’m a pro wielder mimimimimi,” Tommy taunted the older.

Refusing to give in to his antics, Dream just rolled his eyes. “It was a smart plan, all I’m saying is that you can’t use it in a league match! Let’s take a break and I’ll show you some cool forms you *can* use.”

Tommy nodded, eager for any sort of respite. He allowed himself to collapse on the sidelines, his legs and arms felt like mush. He hadn’t pushed himself that hard in ages.

Dream eventually came and sat down beside him, holding out a cup of water which Tommy took gratefully.

“You’re a lot stronger than I thought you were, more controlled too,” Dream said suddenly.

Tommy blushed at the compliment.

“Did you finally start your wielding training? I remember you were still refusing when I left,” Dream laughed lightly, wiping the sweat off his brow with a small towel.

Tommy scowled, “Nah, big man, I think I made it through three sessions with those royal assholes before I fucked off completely.”

“What? Why? The royal trainers are some of the best wielders in the empire, most people would jump at the opportunity to be taught by them!”

Tommy found himself slouching closer to the ground, as if he could melt into it and disappear. He knew how lucky he was, but he also knew, “They were useless. Kept telling me terra wielders were just meant for defense! I got so sick of making three-foot-high walls of dirt that I marched out and vowed to never go back.”

“They had you creating what?” Dream wheezed. “No wonder you ran off! With the amount of mana you have, you should be making at least seven-foot walls.”

Tommy rolled his eyes, “Yeah, ha ha, it’s real funny! I just wanted to do cool attack moves but the trainers were all like ‘meh meh the earth is steadfast meh meh’ it got old. Then they tried to make me write an essay!”

Dream’s wheezes got louder. Tommy huffed and crossed his arms, “I’m glad my suffering amuses you.”

“Sorry,” the knight grinned. “I’m just imagining how well that must’ve gone over.”

Tommy scoffed, “Well enough that they stopped bothering me to show up!”

Dream just continued laughing at his words. After a moment, the knight calmed down. When he did, he stood up, brushing the dirt from his pants, and held out a hand for Tommy. “C’mon, three more rounds and some form exercises then we can go out and enjoy the festival.”

And despite the aching in his muscles that longed for a bed to lay in, he took the knight’s hand with a grin. He’d always wondered what the festival would be like without all the guards and protections. Tommy figured finding out was worth getting the crap kicked out of him by Dream for just a little bit longer.

“Fine, but only if we get to stop by the market on the way back. I haven’t gotten anyone gifts yet,” Tommy bartered.

“Deal,” Dream agreed, his shark-like grin almost enough to make Tommy hesitate.

Almost.

With an explosion of dirt, they began their dance once more.

Chapter End Notes

Holy shit November was crazy and the beginning of December is like equally as insane for me but hopefully it won't take me a whole ass month to upload next time. Had some hardcore writers block too so if this chapter feels a bit meh that's because I felt a bit meh writing it. Still I'm proud of how it turned out so I hope y'all enjoy! (also I finally mapped out the rest of this fic and I'm excited)

p.s. tommy and dream friendship is like my fav to write, it's addictive as hell

p.p.s quackity will be in this fic i promise we're getting to him soon (and it won't be happy so sorry)

a sense of home

Chapter Summary

Tommy isn't exactly having the best time during the festival...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy had never been so grateful to see the grimy tavern Purpled lived above in his entire life. His legs were aching from his practice session with Dream and the impromptu shopping spree he'd gone on in the market (paid for courtesy of Dream's coin purse of course). He would like nothing more than to finally set all of his gifts down and *relax*.

It would seem, however, that he was not in the stars' favor today because Purpled was sat on the front step, clearly waiting for his arrival. When he spotted Tommy, he had jumped up from his seat and bounded over. Nearly jumping on him in the process, his friend only stopped himself at the sight of shiny objects. Though, to his credit, Purpled had taken a few of the objects from Tommy's arms.

"You don't get to keep those," Tommy had grumbled, ignoring Purpled's pout.

"Fine," his friend grumbled, dumping everything back into Tommy's arms. "What's all this for anyway?"

"Gifts, for the Spring Festival," Tommy smiled sheepishly.

"Tommy got something for everyone," Dream teased, but his voice held something fond.

Purpled's hands shot out, making grabbing motions towards the pile of gifts in Tommy's arms, "Oo, oo, give me!"

Tommy rolled his eyes at his friend's antics. "In a second, I need to sit down for a minute. I'm never letting Dream train me again," he groaned.

He pleasantly ignored the spluttering from the man behind him.

"Yeah, sure," Purpled scoffed. "Hurry up, I want my gift!" He ushered Tommy into the near-empty tavern.

It was too early for the usual patrons to start arriving and late enough that any of the previous night's stragglers were long gone. Ever since that first night when he'd seen Wilbur, he'd made a point to steer clear of the tavern when it was busiest. Purpled never mentioned it but Tommy knew he understood something had upset him that night because he only ever invited him in during the quiet times. Even now, there was only Callahan behind the bar and a very sleepy George sitting across from him.

Upon entering Dream headed straight towards the sleeping brunette, ignoring the eye rolls from the two younger boys. Tommy and Purpled, on the other hand, took a seat at one of the long tables. Tommy laid his spoils in front of him, sorting them into small piles and searching for Purpled's gift. His friend watched his hands with hawk-like intensity.

Finally, he found the shining lighter. It was a simple thing, as most festival gifts were, but in Tommy's opinion, it was beautiful. The casing was a classic silver but if you let the light hit it just right it shined purple. The sides were carved with little runes, that glowed a slight blue. It had been one of the more expensive gifts but Tommy knew Purpled was going to love it.

And he was right judging by the excited squeal Purpled had just emitted. "Fucking stars, Tommy! This is so cool," he shouted, turning the lighter over in his hands.

"I know, it's even got enchantments," Tommy pointed to the runes on the side. "One for unbreaking so it lasts for like forever and efficiency so you can light a fire whenever. The merchant who I got it from said it could even start a fire in the middle of a storm!"

Purpled stared at him, eyes wide, "No fucking way! That is so sick, we have to try that sometime!"

“I’m not so sure I’m comfortable letting you two out into a storm just to start fires,” Punz laughed as he took a seat next to Tommy who jumped slightly at the older’s sudden appearance.

Tommy shot the man a bright smile and rifled through the gifts once more before plucking out Punz’s gift. Without a word, he handed Punz a thick gold chain with a small pendant on it. Tommy had even paid an extra silver for the jeweler to engrave a T and P on the back of it. Tommy figured it would be a nice addition to the mercenary’s already impressive jewelry collection.

Punz took the necklace with a raised eyebrow, “And who did you rob from to get this?”

“Dream,” Tommy grinned as Punz snorted.

“What’s it for?”

“He got everyone festival gifts,” Purpled chimed in, motioning towards the piles of trinkets laying on the table.

A look that Tommy would almost call soft, if he didn’t know how much the mercenary hated that word, briefly settled across his features.

“Tommy’s my new favorite little brother,” Punz declared, ruffling Tommy’s curls despite the younger’s complaints.

“What no fair! You’ve known me longer!” Purpled complained.

“Yeah and only one of you has gotten me a festival gift before,” Punz smirked.

“Didn’t realize you were so easily bought,” Sapnap said as he fell into the empty chair next to Purpled.

Tommy stifled a laugh at the older man’s appearance, he looked as if he was just dragged out of bed with his wrinkled shirt and messy hair.

“What can I say, I’ll side with anyone for the right price,” Punz shrugged.

Sapnap rolled his eyes, “I had no idea, that’s only like the 800th time you’ve mentioned it. Anyway,” he turned towards Tommy, “You got anything for me?”

Tommy shot the man an annoyed look, “Is that all you people want me for? My gifts?”

“Yes,” all three men chorused.

“Fuck you!” Tommy shrieked but still searched through his collection.

With a triumphant smile, he pulled free two scrolls of paper and handed them over. He nearly doubled over with laughter at the confused pout Sapnap wore staring at the paper.

“It’s got mimicry magic,” Tommy explained. “Whatever you write on one will show up on the other. See—” he wrote a small smile on of the papers, and they watched as it appeared on the second piece of paper.

“Woah,” Sapnap breathed.

“I figured it would help you and Karl keep in contact while you’re gone,” Tommy chirped. “They’ve got fire resistance and mending enchantments so they should be pretty durable.”

“Stars, Tommy, this is amazing!” Sapnap pulled Tommy into a hug over the table. “Thank you!”

“No problem, just give the other one to Karl tonight and tell him it’s from me.”

“Yeah, of course,” Sapnap grinned looking down at the papers.

A little while later Dream and George joined them at the long table and Tommy had given the still tired man a bag of coffee beans that Dream had said were his favorite. George had accepted them with a small smile so Tommy counted it as a win. They’d just sat and chatted together as the day stretched into evening.

He ended up leaving Foolish and Ponk’s gifts with the older boys since they were going to visit them later. He’d gotten Foolish a cute wooden shark whose tail moved when you wiggled it and Dream had helped him pick out a few healing crystals for Ponk.

When the first of the strangers began showing up, he and Purpled booked it. Afterall, they had a lot of gifts to deliver and only a few hours to do so. They decided to go to Hannah’s shop first since she would probably still be there.

The two boys wove through back alleyways and cut through other buildings, racing each other to see who could reach the florist first. Purpled had the advantage of having run these streets since he could walk but Tommy wasn’t above using his wielding to cheat, just a smidge.

He cackled as his friend tripped on a suspiciously uneven piece of ground, face planting. He could hear Purpled yelling curses behind him, but it just made him laugh and pick up speed. He knew Purpled would find a way to get back at him later.

He ended up being the first in Hannah’s flower shop but only because he’d shoved Purpled out of the way and muscled his way through the door before he could push back.

“Hah, I won,” Tommy declared, jumping slightly to take a seat on the front counter. He dropped his bag of gifts at his feet.

“Only because you cheated,” Purpled complained. “Next time you can’t use your stupid magic,” he grumbled.

“Sure,” Tommy grinned and shrugged, they both knew he was lying. Purpled just shoved him off the counter and took his place.

“Dick,” Tommy whined as he glared at his friend from the ground. Purpled laughed at his pout then glanced around.

He suddenly jumped off the counter and started creeping towards the back of the shop quietly. Tommy stared after his friend in confusion.

“What the fuck are you doing?” he asked, tilting his head slightly.

Purpled turned around swiftly, put a finger to his lips, and glared. He got the message, loud and clear, *shut the fuck up*. He raised his hands in mock surrender and followed his friend. He walked slowly, making sure to place most of his weight towards the front of his foot and space out his weight like Techno had taught him years ago. His footsteps were silent.

Eventually, he caught up with his friend who had an ear pressed against the storeroom door. He took Purpled’s lead and placed an ear against it as well. He couldn’t hear anything for a moment but as he strained his hearing more he began to make out muffled talking.

It sounded like a few different men were talking but after a moment he still couldn’t hear Hannah. Glancing at Purpled they shared a worried look. Tommy tried to focus on the ground, feel the vibrations traveling through it, one of the new tricks Dream had taught him earlier that day. There were at least two people moving around but he had no way of knowing if one of them was Hannah. *Fuck*, he felt useless.

He wanted to race in there, but he knew it was a stupid idea. They didn't even know if Hannah was in there or how many people were in there with her. Tommy racked his brain, searching for some sort of plan, but came up empty-handed. What were they going to do?

Then suddenly the voices got closer and closer.

"I think we've got the wrong place, she's a florist," a small voice suggested.

"Shut up, Charlie, since when are my sources wrong?" another voice growled.

As the second voice finished the door, he and Purpled had been leaning against was opened. Both boys fell headfirst into the backroom, collapsing into a pile of limbs. They quickly scrambled to untangle themselves.

Once he'd freed himself, he took a cursory glimpse around the space. The room was a mess with broken pots scattered around and soil strown about the floor. His gaze stopped Hannah tied to a chair, her eye looking red and swollen, and Tommy felt anger flare up in him.

"Well, well, look what we have here," one of the guys they'd heard talking spoke, drawing both boys' gazes. "It seems as if we've found a couple of nosy brats. What should we do with 'em?" he mused, seemingly amused by the turn of events.

The guy was wearing a dark blue cloak and matching hat but what really drew Tommy's eye was his scar. It stretched from his hairline and jagged down his face, through a milky white eye, and stopped right above his mouth. It only made the guy *slightly* intimidating.

His partner stood warily behind him, hunched over as if he could hide behind his shorter accomplice. He wouldn't meet anyone's gaze, instead, his eyes darted around the room or stared directly down at the floor. His cloak was a vibrant green that, weirdly enough, matched his eyes. Tommy could see what looked to be *sticks*? poking out of his hair.

“Q, m—maybe we should just let ‘em go? They’re just kids after all,” Charlie pointed out, voice wavering.

Q laughed, “So they can run straight to the guard and rat on us? Nah, grab the rope and tie them up. Maybe one of them knows where the prince is,” he instructed the other guy.

Tommy’s blood froze, they were looking for him. He felt Purpled stiffen beside him. They were here for Tommy, probably to kidnap or kill him. *Shit*, he was the reason Hannah had gotten attacked. His momentary immobility allowed the Charlie guy to come up behind him and begin tying his wrists. Upon feeling the rope against his instincts took over. He started thrashing and wriggling, completely forgetting any sort of self-defense training he’d ever received, just trying desperately not to end up tied.

Unsurprisingly his tactics didn’t work, and ‘Q’ had delivered a sharp elbow to his temple, stunning him long enough for his accomplice to finish tying him up. They ended up knocking Purpled out completely after he’d broken free from them and made a dash towards the door.

He hadn’t gotten far before ‘Q’ had pulled out an axe and given him a swift kick to the back of his legs and Purpled tumbled down. ‘Q’ then preceded to bash the handle of the weapon into Purpled’s head and Tommy cried out in horror as his friend went limp.

So there Tommy sat, hands and feet tied, next to his two unconscious friends, refusing to say anything.

“Come on kid,” Q groaned. “Just tell us if you’ve seen a kid about your age in swanky ass clothes, probably wearing a crown.” He motioned towards the top of his head as if pointing to an imaginary crown.

Tommy snorted, did they really think he’d actually come to the city in his royal wardrobe without any sort of protection? He wasn’t really keen on being mugged at knifepoint.

“Please, just give us something and we can let you all go,” the taller criminal pleaded.

Tommy pretended to think about it for a moment before nodding, “okay but can you get a bit closer?”

‘Q’ quickly leaned in closer to him, grinning as if he’d just won something. *Idiot.* Tommy smirked and tilted his head back only to bring it swiftly forward. Their heads collided with a large *craaack* and Tommy laughed.

“Fuck, fuck you! Fucking demon child,” Q yelped, cradling his head in pain.

Tommy just smiled larger, ignoring the pain throbbing in his own head and how his nose was probably broken (it was so worth it).

“That’s it I’m going to—” Q lurched forward, arms out, but Charlie stopped him.

“We’re not killing a human child, Quackity!” he cried. *So scarface’s name is Quackity, good to know.* “How about we come back in an hour and see if the other one will talk when he wakes up. I’ll even stand guard first so you can enjoy the festival! I know you like the...” his voice faded as he led Quackity through the backdoor of the shop.

Once they were out of sight Tommy started testing his bonds. The rope was strong and the knots were tight, *fuck.* It would be hard to get out of them without doing something drastic like dislocating his thumb, which he really didn’t want to do. If he could find something sharp he would probably be able to cut himself free.

Looking around he saw a pair of garden shears on the far table but those were too far and probably too big for him to work with. He had no clue when their captors were coming back so he needed to work fast. Stars above, if only he’d listened to Techno when he told him to always carry a blade on him.

Then he remembered, he may not carry a blade but Purpled would never leave home without his boot dagger. Tommy laughed when Purpled first told him about it.

“Boot dagger? What kind of name is that?” Tommy laughed.

“The kind that makes sense,” the teen sniffed and shoved the small dagger back into his boots. “Better than fuckin’ Shroud.”

“Oi, Shroud is a great name! It’s so cool and mysterious—”

“Purled, psst, Purled!” he whisper yelled, trying to wake his friend up but he remained motionless.

Guess he was doing this the hard way.

Quickly he shuffled over, awkwardly thrusting his legs to inch forward towards his friend’s body. Turning himself around awkwardly so his hands could yank off Purled’s shoes, thank the stars he never tied his laces properly. He was able to pop off the left shoe and shake it but no dagger came out.

“Shit,” he hissed and shifted a bit more to grasp the right one.

He had to tug a bit harder on this one but eventually, it came off too. As the shoe popped free, he heard something else hit the ground. Dropping the boot, he searched the ground blindly until his hands met cool metal. He could kiss the stupid knife.

He gripped the handle in his right hand and carefully positioned the blade against the ropes. It took a bit of sawing but thankfully Purled kept his dagger sharp and eventually the bindings gave way. When his hands were free he moved onto his feet.

When he was completely free, he moved on to Purled, flipping the boy over and cutting away his bindings. Despite all the movement, the other teen remained unconscious. Tommy felt bad for his friend but not bad enough to prevent him from dumping the nearest water pitcher in his face. Purled immediately came to, sputtering and coughing. He jumped up, swaying a bit, and glanced around wildly.

“I’m going to kill you mother—where are my shoes?” he stopped abruptly staring down at his bare feet.

Tommy burst out laughing, “Sorry, my bad, I needed your boot dagger.” He tossed the knife back, which Purpled caught deftly as he knelt to put his shoes back on.

“Hah, I knew boot dagger would come in handy one day! I told you so,” he smirked.

“Still a stupid name,” Tommy grumbled. “Help me free Hannah, would you? I’m going to see if I can hear either of those bitches.” He pointed towards the back door he’d seen the two adults leave through.

Purpled nodded and walked over to the unconscious girl as Tommy walked closer to the door. He couldn’t hear any voices from outside but there was the occasional shuffle. The Charlie dude was probably guarding the back door. Tommy just hoped that Quackity wasn’t waiting for them out front.

“Hey, Tommy,” Purpled called, sounding a little worried. Tommy turned to look at his friend.

“Yeah, what’s up?”

“Can you come here, she’s got weird shit on her wrists and I can’t get it off,” Purpled motioned to their friend’s bindings.

Tommy furrowed his eyebrows and walked back over. Once he reached the other two he crouched down to look at Hannah’s wrists. Purpled was right, she hadn’t been tied up with rope, instead she had weird metal cuffs that were inscribed with small symbols. Upon closer inspection, Tommy realized what they were.

“Suppression cuffs,” he hissed. “That’s why she didn’t just wield her way out of here.”

“Fuck, can you get them off?” Purpled looked worriedly at the cuffs.

“I doubt it, there lock’s pretty complicated on these, maybe we take her to Sam?” Tommy muttered fiddling with the small lock that connected the two cuffs.

From what Tommy could gather, Sam was one of the best blacksmiths in the city and he had magical expertise. If anyone could get the cuffs off it would be him.

“Yeah, good idea! Let’s wake her up first,” Purpled grinned, his smile mischievous.

“No water,” Tommy stated firmly, Purpled pouted. “It’s bad enough you’re drenched but two drenched teens, one of which in cuffs, it’s bound to attract attention. There’s a whole ass festival starting soon, the last thing we need to be doing is drawing more attention to ourselves. The two guys just here, they’re serious dudes, they’ll come looking for us and I’d rather not lead them straight to Sam.”

“Fine,” Purpled huffed, “They were looking for you,” his friend murmured, voice quiet.

“I know,” Tommy sighed. “I knew people would come after me but not like this. I don’t even know how they made the connection to Hannah!” He ran a hand through his curls, hissing as his fingers got caught in a knot and tugged harshly.

“Fuck, they were assholes!” Purpled hissed. “We’re going to have to tell Punz and Dream.”

Tommy nodded, “And Niki.” They both shuddered at the thought of Niki’s reaction to the news. She wasn’t going to let either of them out of the house for days.

They caught eyes and both shook their heads, *it would not be a fun conversation*. After a moment, Purpled’s gaze froze on a spot just below Tommy’s eyes. “Dude, what happened to your face?”

Tommy reached a hand up and touched his tender nose and forehead. When he brought it back down, he saw a few smears of blood. *Shit, he'd definitely broken his nose.*

"I headbutted one of them," he told his friend who immediately began cackling and held his fist out for a fist bump. He met the fist with his own and Purpled clapped him on his back.

"Nice man, Sapnap's gonna love that!"

They both paused as Hannah began to groan. They turned towards her just as she was beginning to blink her eyes open. Tommy gave a small sigh of relief, there's that problem solved.

"Glad you guys are having a fun time, I'll just stay over here, unconscious," she muttered, her voice strained as if she'd been screaming. Tommy pushed down the anger that rose in him again.

"We were just about to wake you up. We need to get to Sam's so he can take those cuffs off you," Purpled told her and grabbed one of her arms. He motioned for Tommy to grab the other and they helped lift her off the ground. Her legs wobbled but held her weight well enough.

"Great, let's go *now*," Hannah urged them and made her way towards the door, seemingly unhindered by how her arms locked behind her back.

The two teens shared a glance but only gave each other a shrug. Tommy pulled off his cloak and slung it over the girl's shoulders, hoping to hide her arms from view. Purpled poked his head out the door leading to the front of the store and then motioned for them to follow him. Purpled led them through the front, followed closely by Hannah and then Tommy who kept a sharp gaze on the storeroom door. Tommy paused at the front counter to pick up his bag.

The moment his fingers had grasped the straps of it, he heard the opening of a door from behind them and shouting coming from the back room. None of the teens hesitated as they

bolted towards the exit, hoping there was no one waiting outside.

The streets were starting to get crowded with people heading towards the festivities. The three of them quickly dove into the nearest group of people. Hopefully, all the people would give them some cover in case anyone came chasing after them. It seemed to work since no one followed them, as far as Tommy could tell. They ran the entire way to Sam's forge, ducking between groups and praying that no one was chasing them.

"Talk about some incompetent criminals," Purpled gasped as they paused to catch their breath before going into Sam's place. Tommy had promptly collapsed to the ground, trying to suck in large gasps of air.

"Not that incompetent," Hannah complained, shaking her arms still tied behind her back.

Tommy hid his snort in a cough, unsuccessfully if the twin glares shot his way were anything to go off of. Ignoring his friends, he gathered himself off the road and marched into Sam's forge.

The smith was always hot, like hotter than the Nether hot. Sam said it was because he always had multiple forges lit. Tommy could already feel the sweat building against his collar, any previous chill was quickly chased away by the heat of the forges.

Tommy allowed his eyes to drag along the walls where lines of swords and shields and even some axes were hung. He knew Sam also did custom orders, but everything out front was boring and not dangerous (or at least not magically dangerous). Sam's fun toys, the ones imbued with magic or tempered with potions, were hidden safely in the back. That was where Sam normally was, so that was where he headed.

Sure enough, when he found his way through the iron door leading into the backroom, Sam was leaning over his crafting table. It looked like he was hammering out a diamond sword, *cool*.

"Hey, Sammy," Tommy announced his presence. He hopped up onto the crafting table to get a better look at the weapon being made. Sam let out a noise of surprise but didn't look up.

Ever since their first meeting all those weeks ago, Tommy had grown a bit attached to Sam. The older man had become a sort of father figure in Tommy's life. He and Purpled would stop by every now and then and Sam would ask about their adventures, always making time to listen to their stories (even the ones that were ridiculously exaggerated) and asked all the right questions.

He was so kind and patient with Tommy, so opposite his own father that it made his head feel fuzzy. Sam even fixed Tommy's lock picks every now and then when they started getting bent or shipped. Some days when Purpled was busy with Punz and Tommy had to figure out what to do with himself, he'd go to Sam's alone. The blacksmith would explain whatever project he was working on, talking Tommy through every step as they went. Sometimes he even let Tommy help. Slowly, Sam had become one of his favorite people in the city and, based off the fond smile Sam always wore when he came around, the feeling was mutual.

"That door was locked," Sam pointed out but he sounded more amused than upset.

"Was it? I hadn't noticed," he grinned. "I—we need your help," he said seriously.

Something in his tone must have hinted at the severity of the situation because Sam put down his tools and turned his attention to Tommy. He stared at the younger for a moment, taking in his face, which was no doubt a mess of blood and bruises.

"Stars, kid, what happened to you?" Sam asked, hands gently prodding his tender skin. Tommy let out a pained hiss when he touched a particularly painful bruise.

"Someone broke into Hannah's and we had to save her," he explained, leaving out as many details as possible.

"We?" Sam asked, eyebrow raised.

"Yeah, me and Purpled. He's here too with Hannah, she's why we need your help. They put these suppression cuffs on her and I couldn't get them off," he explained, looking down.

Sam's expression softened.

"That's not on you, those cuffs are made to be hard to get off," he reassured. "Let's see what I can do, hmm. Bring them back here will you."

Tommy darted back out front and motioned for the two to the back. He was even gracious enough to hold the door open as they passed. Purpled, ever the gentleman, let Hannah go first. And by let, he means Hannah shouldered her way past Purpled before he could even start to move.

"Asshole, you know I can't pick Sam's locks," Purpled groused as he walked past into the workshop. Tommy just shot him a grin before shutting the door once more.

Sam had sat Hannah near his crafting table and pulled out a shining pair of lock picks. Tommy bounced over, tracing a hand over the enchanted tools. Sam was probably the best enchanter in the city, even better than the royal one, but he kept his skills pretty quiet. Tommy never knew why, if he was half as talented as Sam he'd be advertising it on every building in the capitol. Everything he enchanted ended up being so cool.

His lock picks were no exception. Tommy suspected they had some sort of looting and luck enchantments placed on them. Sam worked quickly, fiddling with the lock for a moment before selecting a longer pick and a hooked tool. In about 30 seconds Hannah was rubbing her unshackled wrists.

Sam handed Tommy a wet rag for his bloody face, which he took gratefully. Sam motioned for him to sit on the stool Hannah had previously just occupied. He sat hesitantly as Sam began to look over his injuries.

"I think I'm going to need to set your nose," he grimaced. That sounded painful. Sam must have noticed his anxiety because he continued, "It'll only hurt for a second then everything'll be fine. It's better than a crooked nose, trust me."

And Tommy did trust him, big mistake.

“On the count of three, okay? One, two—” Sam snapped his nose back into place. Tommy felt a flash of white-hot pain that lingered.

“Fuck you, you said three! Where did you learn how to count, fucking asshole?” he screeched.

“Sorry kid, my bad but you’re all good now,” Sam grinned and turned his attention to Purpled who was staring at them in abject horror. “Your turn,” Sam grinned.

“Nope, I’m good! All good, never been better,” Purpled laughed nervously.

Eventually, Sam did look over all of their injuries and deemed them healthy enough to get home safely, and walked them out towards the front of the shop. He and Purpled had taken most of the beating, Tommy would probably have two black eyes and a tender nose for a few days and Purpled had a lump on his head the size of a walnut. They both also had an assortment of various cuts and bruises all over their arms and face. While Hannah barely had a scratch on her, beyond the slowly forming black eye.

“Thanks, Sam, you’re a lifesaver,” she hugged the older man as he finished packing away the medical supplies.

“Of course, do you have somewhere to stay tonight? I don’t want you going back to your shop if you just got robbed,” Sam asked, concerned.

“I’ll probably stay with Boomer, he owes me a favor anyway,” she smirked.

“We can walk you,” Purpled piped up.

“Nu-uh, young man, you need to go home and see your brother. He’s going to be upset when he sees the state you are in,” Sam reminded him. Tommy snickered at Purped’s horrified

expression, no doubt imagining the lecture he'd be getting from Punz.

"You two, Toms, Niki's gonna throw a fit when she sees the state of your nose."

Now it was Tommy's turn to grimace, Niki was never going to let him out of the house again. Dream would probably be pretty pissed too. A small part of his heart warmed at the thought of Dream and Niki caring about his bruised eye and bloody clothes. The larger part dreaded any lecture from them, they were going to be so disappointed in him. But he knew he deserved their disappointment because this time it had been his fault they'd gotten hurt. Those criminals were looking for him and they only attacked Hannah because of him.

"Go on, get out of here! I'll walk Hannah to Boomer's," he shooed them out of his shop. Both boys waved goodbye to Hannah on the way out who shot them a smile in return.

They were almost out the door when Tommy remembered his bag. He quickly turned back around, rifling through his bag until he found the two objects he was looking for. One small glass rose (somehow undamaged despite the night's escapades) and a pouch of lapis.

"Happy Spring Festival!" Tommy crowed as he shoved the presents into his friend's surprised hands.

He didn't wait for their thanks, just took off running with Purpled following close behind.

As they raced down the streets, festival-goers stopped to stare. They must have been quite the sight to see, two boys covered in bandages and bruises, grinning madly as they chased each other down the streets.

They'd stopped by the tavern briefly, but Callahan had told them everyone had left ages ago to watch the parade go through the plaza. So, they hiked to Niki's instead.

Luckily (well not for Tommy), Niki hadn't left yet. She was wiping the counters down as they stumbled into the bakery. Her face twisted into a look of concern the moment she saw

them.

“Stars, what happened? Are you okay? Who did this?” her questions never seemed to end.

Tommy groaned, ignoring the small part of his mind that was distinctly pleased by her worry. “Purled and I saved Hannah’s shop from being robbed,” he said in lieu of an explanation.

“That gives me absolutely nothing!” Niki huffs, exasperated. “Does Punz at least know about this? Or Dream?”

Both boys cringed slightly. “We went to the tavern but Calla told us they’d already left for the Plaza!” Purled told her, head lowered like a kicked puppy.

Niki sighed, “Alright, let’s get you two cleaned up and go find them.”

“Sam already fixed us up!” Tommy beamed but his smile fell as he saw Niki’s face hardened slightly.

“You went to Sam’s before finding Punz or me?”

Oh, “No!” Tommy squeaked, waving his hands. “Well yes but only because Hannah had these handcuffs on and I couldn’t get them off.”

“You should’ve seen us,” Purled piped up. “I was drenched because Tommy had dumped an entire pitcher of water on me to wake me up, and he had all this blood coming out of his nose,” his friend gestured to the front of Tommy’s very bloody shirt. “Even Hannah had a black eye and she had to run weird because her hands were cuffed behind her! We must have looked crazy running to Sam’s,” he laughed.

Niki’s face smoothed out, her eyes shining with barely concealed amusement. “So instead of getting immediate medical attention, you decided to focus on helping Hannah get out of

handcuffs?"

Purpled looked away sheepish, "Well when you put it that way, it sounds silly."

"Well, I'm just glad everyone's okay," Niki ruffled their hair. "But we still need to find the others. So go change into some more appropriate attire, we have a festival to enjoy afterall!" she clapped her hands.

Tommy grinned at Niki's words before he grabbed his friend's hand and began tugging him upstairs. "C'mon, Purp, I've got some clothes you can borrow!"

They came down a few minutes later, dressed in considerably cleaner (and in Tommy's case not covered in blood) clothes. Purpled had snatched one of Tommy's nicer, light grey tunics and a pair of trousers, which he had to roll up at the bottom because they were just a smidge too large much to his dismay.

Tommy hadn't even tried to hide his laughter, to which he was rewarded with a pillow to the face. Tommy had tugged on a familiar red tunic and brown pants, something so plain and ordinary that he never would have been allowed to wear them in the palace. They'd both kept their shoes and cloaks the same, although Tommy had given Purpled a hat to wear.

Niki must have changed while they had because she looked especially nice now. She wore a long, black dress with a heavy, fur-lined cloak overtop and matching long, black gloves. Tommy eyed the outfit suspiciously; it was far nicer than the average festival outfit.

"I thought we were going to the plaza?" he asked.

Niki hummed slightly, "We are, I just have somewhere to go after."

"Ooh, someone has a date," Purpled crowed, all too pleased with himself for the deduction.

"I—no—you," Niki spluttered before sighing and nodding. "Yeah, I do but we have to get you two to Dream and Punz. I'm not about to let you guys out of my sight for the next year after all this."

Tommy felt a rush of guilt course through him, heavy and hot. "Sorry," he mumbled. "We can just stay here."

Niki softened immediately, "Oh no, I'm not mad!" she pulled him into a hug. "I'm so, *so* proud of you. What you did was incredibly brave, but it was also dangerous and I worry for you. I don't mind being a little late for some date, if it means I know you'll be safe."

Tommy melted into Niki's embrace, the events of the past few hours finally sinking in. He let out a quiet sob and from somewhere behind him he heard another sniffle. Quickly, he shot a hand out and pulled Purpled into the hug as well. He heard Niki laugh wetly but she only held them tighter.

When they pulled away, Niki took a moment to wipe away both boys' tears. "None of that," she scolded them. "There's a festival happening, we should be celebrating."

Both boys nodded, pulling themselves together again. Niki gave them a moment to gather themselves before handing them each a small box from off the counter. Tommy shot her a quizzical look.

"A festival gift," she explained, laughing as both boys tore open the boxes.

Tommy grinned as he looked at the contents of his gift. Four éclairs sat in wrapping paper, each sprinkled with pieces of gold foil and silver sprinkles. Purpled let out a small whoop beside him.

The gift prompted Tommy to remember his own and he went diving into his bag once more. He pulled out a circular, bejeweled hair clip. It sparkled in the dim lighting of the bakery, making it look almost like a halo.

"I got you a gift too," Tommy beamed. "I'm not too sure how to use it but the merchant said you can put your hair in it and stick the needle through and it won't move!"

Niki laughed lightly, "Thanks, Tommy, I love it!" She pulled Tommy into a gentle side hug as she looked over the hair clip.

"As cute as this is, can we go find Punz now?" Purpled asked through a mouth full of pastry.

Niki and Tommy shared a disgusted glance before breaking out into laughter.

"Of course, let's head out, shall we?" Niki led them out of the bakery, secretly grinning at the sight of the two boys trailing behind her. *Like little duckling*, she thought to herself.

She found her gaze lingering on Tommy and she thought back to the hair hoop that now lay heavy in her pocket. How anyone could hurt that boy, she had no idea. Tommy had been nothing but a light in this often dark city. She caught sight of the bruises blooming across the boy's face once more and found a new sort of anger rising in her. She would find out who had hurt her little brother and when she did there would be hell to pay.

Chapter End Notes

this is an apology for making you wait a month for the last update but I make no promises about updating this quickly ever again. I have so many things I want to add but I'm trying to stick to my plot but it just keeps getting harder. This chapter is no exception, it's so much longer than I meant and didn't even finish where I wanted it to. i like to throw in a good mix of angst and comfort in each chapter but I will say there is a good amount of angst to come within the next few chapters so have fun! Hope everyone enjoyed :)

p.s. did everyone enjoy meeting big q?

what a festival

Chapter Summary

Nothing bad ever happens at festivals, no never (a little Tommy angst and a whole lot of build up)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They found Punz watching one of the parades with George and Callahan. When they caught sight of the trio, Tommy nearly burst out laughing at Callahan's outfit. It seemed the man had joined in on the costuming portion of the holiday and had taped two antlers to the top of his head.

Purpled, of course, ran ahead and immediately tried to yank at one but the silent man just kept sidestepping until Punz managed to grab the back of his brother's tunic.

By the time Tommy and Niki had arrived, Purpled was cursing out his brother looking very much like a scruffed kitten while Callahan stood to the side whistling silently. Tommy, being the good friend he was, pointed and laughed which led to Purpled trying to jump at Tommy.

“Settle down,” George rolled his eyes. “Some of us want to enjoy this parade without getting kicked out.”

“How can you get kicked out of a parade, Gogy? It’s literally outside,” Tommy grinned.

“You. Are. A. Child,” George said with a vicious smile.

“Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you!” Tommy yelled.

George turned to glare down at him, probably preparing some snide insult, but paused taking in the state of Tommy's face. The brunette's expression softened slightly, "What in the stars happened to your face?"

Tommy grinned, ignoring the sharp stinging in his nose, "I beat up a bunch of pricks and defended so many women, Gogs, you wouldn't believe it!"

"Technically it was only one woman," Purpled cut in. "And I don't even know if Hannah counts as a woman," he groaned, cut off as Punz elbowed him.

George rolled his eyes. "What I can't believe is that your face could get uglier," he said plainly.

"Oh, you know what, fuck you!"

"Is fuck the only word you know?"

"Mimimimimi my name is Gogy and I think I'm so cool and handsome and Dream is my boy
____"

"Tommy?" A familiar voice broke through the noise of the parade.

"Sam," he and Purpled cried in unison.

Punz finally dropped Purpled, knowing his attention had finally shifted away from things with murderous intent to something gleeful. Both boys ran towards the large man.

"Oof," Sam grunted as both boys jumped at him. "Hello to you as well."

“Hi, Sam,” they both chorused. “What are you doing here?” Tommy asked.

“Calla invited me, I wasn’t about to miss the Spring Parade now, was I?” Sam laughed.

Tommy grinned, “Yeah, well think fast!”

Tommy quickly jumped, latching onto the older man’s back while Purpled followed suit and attached himself to Sam’s leg. The older man stumbled a bit but righted himself quickly. Tommy and Purpled giggled, clutching onto the man with sticky fingers. However, Sam didn’t seem to mind too much as he slowly started moving them all back to the group.

Niki sighed once they were in earshot, but it was George who spoke first.

“Children,” he muttered.

“Fuck you,” Tommy said, smiling down at the man from Sam’s shoulders.

Tommy could feel Sam’s laugh through the back of his tunic. “It’s alright, I don’t mind the little goblins.”

“Hey!” Tommy and Purpled grumbled in unison.

Suddenly Sam shifted, jostling Tommy’s head causing him to hiss slightly. Niki let out a concerned noise and Punz shifted forward as if to catch Tommy.

“I’m fine,” Tommy waved them off. “Not made of glass, y’know, I’ve been through worse” he mumbled. The silence that followed was uncomfortable, some undiscernible tension seemed to build in the air.

“Are you coming to the match on Friday?” George asked Sam, steering the conversation away from the serious conversation.

“What match?” Tommy asked, peering out from behind Sam’s shoulder.

“Dream’s going against the Blood God,” Purpled told him, looking up from his position wrapped around Sam’s leg. “How has Dream not mentioned it? It’s like the only reason he came back.”

Tommy bit back a wince at the words, Purpled hadn’t meant any harm. Logically, Tommy knew Dream came back for more than that, but it still stung a bit to hear. He laughed loudly, hoping no one noticed his brief frown. “Oh, so Gogy wants us to watch his boyfriend get his ass kicked,” Tommy taunted.

“He’s not my—fuck off, you little cretin!” George muttered. “Besides, he’s not gonna get his ass kicked,” he sniffed.

Tommy nodded his head seriously, “I’m sure, you are never wrong Sir Gogs.”

George rolled his eyes once more, “You do realize this is the same Dream who just beat your ass in the training arena?”

“Sure, but I’m not the *Blood God*.”

“Yeah, the Blood God is like insane. He’s been the reigning League champion for like two years,” Purpled added.

Sam shrugged, “I don’t know, Dream is pretty crafty.”

“Yeah but—” Purpled started to disagree.

“I guess we’ll just have to see at the match then,” Punz interrupted before a real argument could start. “Now get off Sam. He’s not a personal jungle gym and you each have enough bruises as is,” Punz scolded them, gently poking at them to get off the blacksmith.

Scoffing, both boys detangled themselves from the older before settling a few feet away. The adults talked for a few more minutes while Purpled and Tommy began throwing loose handfuls of snow at some of the parade participants. Punz had tried to step in when they’d hit a rather obnoxious golden sunflower actor causing them to fall in the street, knocking down the three performers behind them too. Obviously, Punz was met with a face full of snow.

It wasn’t long before Niki decided to take her leave, seeing as the boys were now in safe hands (relatively speaking).

“Alright, I need to head out now,” Niki told them, glancing at her watch. “I trust the guys will keep an eye on you two,” she shot a look to the older four men, each of whom nodded frantically.

“Bye Niki,” Tommy waved as he watched her walk into the crowds, heels clicking on the cobble streets. “She scares me,” he whispered to Purpled.

“Same,” his friend nodded very seriously.

“All right, you heard the scary lady, we’re in charge,” Punz pulled them apart. “Which means no more throwing snow.”

Tommy huffed, “No, I only listen to Sam.”

George snorted while Punz’s expression morphed into something incredulous. “What? Why?” he spluttered

Tommy sniffed, “Because I have taste.”

“Well, I agree, no more snow throwing,” Sam cut in.

“You all suck,” Purpled whined.

Of course, both boys still took turns subtly throwing snow (and rocks and even a few sticks) at the passing performers while the other distracted the adults. After the eighth moon ray tripped in the middle of the road, George had sent them off with a few coins to find some candy.

Purpled had wanted to blow it all on some fluffy-looking monstrosity called ‘cotton candy’ but Tommy didn’t stop moving until he found a vendor selling those familiar candied apples. It had taken a few minutes but eventually, Tommy found a cart with the shiny fruit painted on the side. One apple cost all the pocket money George had given them, much to Purpled’s dismay, so they had to share.

“I’m just saying we could have each had like a pretzel and cotton candy,” Purpled complained. “This better actually taste like gold for how much it—mph,” Purpled grunted as Tommy shoved a bit of apple into his mouth to shut him up.

“Shut up and enjoy it,” Tommy grinned, chewing his own piece. It wasn’t quite as good as the ones he used to get but the feelings it brought were just the same. He loved springtime.

He watched Purpled’s eyes light up as he tasted the treat. “Holy shit,” his friend whispered, taking another bite out of his piece.

Tommy laughed (only a bit smugly), “I know, I’m a genius and the best person to ever exist.”

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves.”

“Fuck you,” Tommy laughed as he pushed his friend which led to Purpled elbowing him and almost causing him to drop his half of the apple. “Hey man watch it!” he cried.

Purpled just grinned, an evil glint in his eye. “Race ya back to Punz and whoever wins gets the other's half!”

As expected, Purpled did not wait for an answer, taking off immediately in the direction they'd come from.

“Fuck,” Tommy shouted as he ran after his friend, shoveling the treat in his mouth as he ran.

Purpled had won (only because he cheated, Tommy insisted), but it didn't matter because Tommy had finished his half of the apple as he ran. Purpled swore when he realized he wouldn't be getting his prize and began chasing Tommy around with a stick, much to the dismay of everyone around them.

Needless to say, it only took an hour before Punz had enough of their shit and sent them back to the tavern claiming there were too many guards around for Tommy to still be out. They were both surprised the older had lasted that long. Sam was the one chosen to walk them back to the Tavern, where apparently Tommy would be spending the night since Niki wouldn't be home until late.

They were careful on the way back since the lower city seemed to be crawling with guards for whatever reason (probably because three, wet children went running through the streets earlier that day). All the sneaking around corners and ducking into alleys caused guilt to build up in Tommy. The more he thought about it, the more he realized how much he'd interfered with his friends' lives. Punz and Purpled could have enjoyed the festival together if it weren't for him. Hannah never would have been injured and Sam never would have gotten dragged into his mess if he hadn't interfered. Everyone wouldn't have to worry about their jobs or keeping their *lives* if it weren't for him.

He was too busy moping, to notice the concerned looks his companions shot him. It was always upsetting to see the usually bright boy, silent.

When they finally reached the Tavern, Tommy decided to give Sam his gift. A small apology for all the trouble he'd caused. He let Purpled head inside first and waited until his friend had disappeared behind the doors before he numbly pressed a piece of lapis into Sam's hand with a quiet, "Happy Spring."

It felt like an apology. It felt like failure. He swallowed the bitter taste left behind in favor of enjoying the warm hug Sam pulled him into. When they pulled back, Sam kept a hand on his wrist, stopping him from heading inside. The blacksmith then began rifling through his bag, looking for something.

"Here," Sam said as he pulled out a small cloth bundle and handed it over to Tommy.

The younger quickly took it, shooting Sam a questioning gaze to which the older man laughed gently. "Go on, open it! It's a festival gift," Sam explained.

Tommy huffed a laugh as he pulled apart the cloth and gasped. Inside lay a shiny, new set of lock picks. The little runes carved on the sides and the light purple sheen of the metal told Tommy they were enchanted. He picked up one reverently, turning the tool so it caught the light and the glow of the enchantments turned it almost blue. They were magnificent, much better than the lump of lapis he'd gifted the older.

"You shouldn't have," he breathed.

Sam grinned, "Probably not, they've got a pretty powerful luck enchantment so you should be able to open just about anything with 'em."

Tommy was left speechless, staring at the tools with wet eyes. It had been a while since he'd been given a festival gift and today, he'd been given two. It all felt too much, he felt undeserving of this love when all he brought was trouble.

His bruises throbbed, just another reminder of the pain he brought. "I don't deserve this," he whispered.

Sam seemed taken aback, crouching in front of the boy he hooked a finger under Tommy's chin and forced him to meet Sam's unflinching gaze. "You do deserve this," he touched the cloth bundle, "And so much more. You deserve love, more love than I can give you, and you deserve people who care about you. I know you don't like talking about your family but know you deserve more than them."

Tommy let out a bitter laugh. *More than the Emperor; more than royalty?* If only Sam knew. Suddenly Tommy was hit with a wave of desperation. He hated tricking Sam, always skirting the truth when it came to his life before. And Sam, Sam who was always so kind and understanding, never pushed. For a moment he was back in the older's workshop, heat licking his neck as Sam ran a wet cloth under his nose trying to wipe off his blood. He couldn't stomach the lies any longer.

"It's my fault," he forced out the words in a quiet voice. At Sam's confused stare he continued, "Earlier today, Hannah's shop getting broken into, her getting hurt, Purpled getting hurt. It's all my fault!"

Sam tugged the boy into a tight hug. "I sincerely doubt that," Sam muttered into his blonde hair.

"It's true," Tommy insisted. "The burglars were looking for me."

"Why would they be doing that?" Tommy could hear the confusion in the older's voice.

"Because I'm the prince—or well a prince, and I ran away so now everyone's looking for me and I keep getting people hurt because of it," Tommy cried.

He could feel Sam tense as Tommy finally told him the truth and it was all Tommy could do to not rip himself away and flee. Sam seemed to sense his thoughts because his grip suddenly tightened.

"Oh kid," he breathed. "It's not your fault, okay? Who else knows?"

Tommy hesitated. “Well, there’s Purpled, Punz, Niki, Dream and his crew, I think Skeppy knows and maybe Karl but that’s it! Well, and you now,” he ticked off albeit a bit sheepishly.

“Stars, remind me not to tell you any secrets,” Sam chuckled.

“Oi, fuck off dickhead!”

After what felt like an eternity (but not nearly long enough) Sam let him go. They both stood there for a minute, unsure of how to continue the conversation.

At long last Sam caved, “I’m sorry you didn’t get to finish watching the parade.”

Tommy scoffed, “It’s my own fault, innit? We probably shouldn’t have thrown snow at that one butterfly, man she was nasty.” Both boys laughed and it struck Tommy then that Sam was so much younger than he seemed.

The man standing before him, laughing in the moonlight, reminded him of his brothers not his father, and yet he’d come to see the man as a fatherly figure. He wondered if he got attached too quickly, Techno had always said his heart was larger than his head. He wondered how much it would hurt to let this all go, if he would survive letting go?

“Never change, kid,” Sam ruffled his hair.

Suddenly the window above them slammed open causing both boys to jump. Purpled’s head popped out, a mad grin splitting his face. “Hurry the fuck up Tommy, Punz left all his swords out!”

Glancing between Purpled, half hanging out the window, and Sam, grinning softly at them in the way he’d only seen Phil do when he watched Techno spar or Wilbur play his lyre, Tommy decided that no, he probably wouldn’t survive losing this. Strangely enough, the thought comforted him.

“Awesome!” Tommy cheered as Sam whispered, “Stars above.”

Tommy quickly bid Sam a goodbye as he raced inside. Not wanting to think much more about the future, he slammed the doors open. As he wove through patrons, towards the back of the tavern, he was focused on thoughts of sharp swords and the dueling practice he and Purpled were about to have. Too preoccupied with his own mind, Tommy failed to notice the musician at the front of the room who missed a note.

Wilbur burst through the door to the antechamber, Fundy hot on heels. Techno, Phil, and Captain Puffy were scattered around a table covered in maps and posters with a young, smiling blonde boy on them. *When was the last time he'd seen Tommy smile like that?* Wilbur nearly paused at the thought but carried on, he would have all the time in the world to make his brother smile *after* they found him and brought him home.

The other three adults seemed to be too caught up in arguing about something to notice his arrival.

“Three teenagers running through the streets is not a cause for concern?” Techno growled.

“All reports point out that they were *street* kids,” Puffy argued. “If it was Tommy, why hadn’t he just gone to a guard? The streets are crawling with them.”

“But one of them did match Tommy’s description?” Phil asked.

“Well yes but—” Puffy started but Wilbur cut her off.

Wilbur couldn’t wait any longer. “I saw Tommy!” he burst out.

They all turned to look at him in unison in varying degrees of shock. It was quiet for a moment, the others most likely processing Wilbur's statement, before they all started asking questions simultaneously.

"You what?"

"Where did you see him?"

"Are you sure it was him?"

"Why didn't you bring him home?"

Wilbur held a hand up and grinned. "One at a time people, stars! First, I saw him in the lower city in some tavern I go to sometimes. And yes, I'm sure it was him, Fundy saw him too," Wilbur turned to his bodyguard for confirmation to which the boy nodded assuredly. "See, he was there!"

"That doesn't explain why Tommy's not here now. Why didn't you grab him?" Techno demanded.

"You don't think I tried too?" Wilbur huffed. "The place was crowded, I don't know if you noticed but there's a festival happening right now! By the time I got anywhere near where I saw him, Tommy was gone. But now we know where to look!"

"Are you sure it was him?" Puffy asked, her tone wary.

"Yes!" Wilbur cried exasperated.

"I don't know it seems odd. Tommy is just wandering through the lower districts and just happens to be in the same tavern as you, at the same time," Techno shrugged, his tone unconvinced.

"I know what I saw! Fundy back me up," Wilbur demanded.

The boy behind him stepped forward slightly, "It's true, I saw him too. If it wasn't Prince Thomas then he must have some street kid twin because it was his face alright."

The three others shared a look before Phil shrugged and nodded. "It's better than anything we've got. Okay, Puffy send a group of soldiers to search the er—"

"Tavern," Wilbur reminded him

"Right, I'm sure Fundy can give directions. But let's not send too many, the last thing we need is to cause a scene."

Puffy nodded and quickly left the room taking a grim-faced Fundy with her, most likely to gather some guards. The three royals were left in the room alone together. A heavy silence fell upon them, each seemingly deep in thought.

Suddenly Phil spoke up, "Hold on, why were you in a tavern?"

Wilbur rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly, "Uh... no comment?"

Chapter End Notes

So sorry this actually took me months and it's pretty short but I had an insane schedule and writer's block. But hey I'm excited to continue this again so thank you to everyone whose stuck with me :) also it's my birthday so leave a kudos or comment and maybe I'll respond! Oh I also just made a [twitter](#) so come follow me if you want updates about fics or just to say hi! (new year and new me is trying to be more interactive)

festivals, flames, and family

Chapter Summary

The festival finally comes to an end and Tommy can safely say he loves his family (despite the mounting guilt that seems to accompany that love).

Chapter Notes

TW: description of a house fire and a little bit of gore (mostly in reference to burns) plus a little bit of childhood trauma
be safe everyone and enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy was choking. He couldn't breathe as his lungs filled with smoke. The room around him was on fire, flames licked up the wooden walls. He frantically kicked off the blankets that seemed determined to tie him to the bed. Tommy searched the room for some sort of escape but the dark smoke made it hard to see anything.

Stumbling out of the small bed he frantically tried to recall what Tubbo had once said about house fires. "*They burn fast and the smoke can be really bad for you since it's got like particles or some shit in it. My dad said if our house ever caught on fire you have to cover your mouth with your shirt and stay near the walls until you find a door something.*" It had been an inane conversation brought about by pure boredom one summer evening after they'd heard one of the serving girl's house was lost to flames. Now it was about to save his life.

He grabbed one of the blankets and tore off a piece to cover his mouth and stumbled over in the direction of what he hoped was a wall. His trembling hand hit something solid and he let out a sigh of relief, carefully he began edging around the room until he found a window. Without hesitating, he threw it open and jumped. The landing wasn't as jarring as he imagined, his knees not aching quite like they should be from a jump that high, and he began running.

Heat licked the back of Tommy's legs as the building behind him was set ablaze. Looking back at the building bathed in shades of orange, he realized with dawning horror that it was the tavern. Distantly he remembered falling asleep in Purpled's bed. He looked around, desperately trying to find Purpled or Punz. He prayed to the saints and kings of old that they were safe.

"Help," a familiar voice called out from the window he just escaped from. "Please help!"

Tommy's blood ran cold, *that was Purpled!* He coughed out a strangled noise trying to yell back, trying to tell the boy to jump, but his voice wasn't working. He tried desperately to shout but no words fell from his mouth. The smoke sat heavy in his throat, his mouth lined with black ash.

He watched with dawning horror as the building in front of him became engulfed in flames. Prupled's screams sounded clearly over the crackling of the fire. Tommy fought off the rising nausea. Suddenly his legs could no longer support him and he sunk to his knees on the cobble street.

"It's your fault," a voice sounded suddenly from behind him. Tommy whipped around to see Punz standing behind him, his white cloak covered in soot and his hands burned. "You didn't even try to save him. This is all your fault."

Tommy shook his head desperately, trying to explain how he hadn't known Purpled was still in the room, how he'd tried to yell out, but the words still weren't coming. He wanted to scream.

"You killed me." Tommy whipped around at the sound of Purpled's voice. His friend stood in front of him, skin blistering and bubbled, half his face was *melted*. Tommy gagged at the sight of his friend. "They came for you and now I'm dead!"

No, this wasn't real! Tommy fought the panic crawling up his throat. He wanted to shout, defend himself, anything, but his voice still wasn't working. All he could do was sink to his knees, eyes never leaving his friend's half-burnt face.

“They came for you,” Tommy looked around and saw the hauntingly familiar white and blue flags printed with his family’s crest. “I died because of you, this is all your fault!”

“You killed him, Tommy,” Punz spoke once more.

“You weren’t strong enough,” Dream’s voice came from his right, a flash of green in his periphery.

“You weren’t fast enough,” Wilbur laughed from his other side.

“Tommy, you failed,” they all laughed, a haunting sound.

“NO!” he finally screamed, his voice strangled and breathless. “no, no, no!”

“Tommy,” Dream mocked.

“Tommy,” Purpled moaned.

“TOMMY,” Punz screamed—wait no that was Purpled?

“TOMMY!”

He jolted awake in sweat-soaked sheets. Frantically he glanced around, his gaze landing on Purpled. He looked unharmed besides that rather alarmed expression the boy was wearing. Tommy threw himself into his friend’s arms.

“Woah,” Purpled patted his back stiffly. “This is great and all but we need to go. Like *now!*”

Tommy froze at the sudden similarity to his dream but a cursory glance around the room showed no flames or smoke (*he was safe, Purpled was safe, safe, safe*). Shaking away his thoughts he tried to follow his friend's lead, tumbling out of bed and grabbing his satchel before placing random shit in it.

“What’s going on?”

“Royal guards are downstairs,” Purpled whispered.

Tommy froze, “Are you sure?”

“They’re not very subtle,” Purpled grinned, “Callahan spotted them the minute they walked in and he’s stalling them for us but we need to go.”

Tommy nodded, “Fuck, okay yeah,” then he paused. “Wait, if the guards are downstairs, how are we getting out?”

Purpled scoffed, “The window of course.”

“Fuck no,” Tommy immediately disagreed, his dream was becoming some weird fucking premonition and he wasn’t having it. His friend’s screams still echoed in his ears.

His friend just rolled his eyes. “Don’t get soft on me, prince boy, it’s either the window or half a dozen royal guards and I like our odds with the window better.”

Tommy gulped, looking around for another escape route but he knew Purpled was right. “Okay, okay,” he conceded, “but you have to go first.”

Purpled would never suffer because of him, never again.

“Fine, whatever,” Purpled agreed, obviously not wanting to waste any more time.

The sound of a lone pair of feet climbing the creaky steps up to the loft causes both boys to whip towards the door, falling completely silent. Purpled cursed quietly, eyeing the door cautiously.

The knob started turning slightly and Tommy stiffened. In their exhaustion from the day’s escapades, neither of them had thought to *lock the door*. Tommy lunged forward just as the door began to open, using his body weight to slam the door closed again and flip the lock.

The person on the other side of the door, *a royal guard* his mind supplied helpfully, began yelling. Tommy shot a wide-eyed look towards Purpled who stood frozen, staring at the door in horror.

“Open the fucking window!” Tommy hissed, motioning towards the still closed window.

His order snapped Purpled into action. His friend turned to the window, pulling at the handle to open it. To their horror, it didn’t budge. The door behind Tommy began to shake as if someone was trying to shoulder the door open.

“Hurry up,” Tommy cried as the door groaned under the opposing force.

“I’m trying,” Purpled gritted, still yanking on the door. “It’s stuck!”

“Well fucking try harder!”

Tommy could feel the door giving against his back. When he glanced to the side he watched as the lock snapped. Quickly, he flung himself away from the door and towards the window with his friend. He grabbed the handle with Purpled and yanked in a last-ditch attempt to pry the star damned thing open.

The window snapped open under their combined force. Tommy quickly shoved Purpled out the window as the door finally caved and guards came flooding in. Tommy turned to face them, half hanging out the window already. His gaze met Fundy's sharp one briefly, the man's eyes were tired but deadly. Tommy grinned, *good Fundy was an asshole*. He offered the man a matching sharp grin before giving a two-fingered salute as he jumped out of the window. He felt the brush of something cool and *wet* just as he cleared the window. *Fundy's water*, Tommy realized grimly. He jerked his head to the side but that didn't stop the stinging sensation he felt bloom across his cheek. Tommy hated that stupid water whip. Luckily the whip was all Fundy had time for before Tommy was out of reach.

Cursing slightly, Tommy hit the ground with a grunt. It wasn't quite as graceful as in his dream, and certainly more painful, but he picked himself up. Purpled shot him an impressed look and nod, grinning a bit too large for just having fallen out of a window. Tommy just hoped he hadn't gotten a concussion because they weren't in the clear yet. Tommy could still hear Fundy's shouts from the window above them. He had no doubt the soldiers would give chase so they needed to go, *now*.

Without wasting a second he grabbed his friend and took off down the side streets. Purpled kept up beside him as they ran down the winding alleys. The sound of heavy footfalls bounced off the walls around them. When Tommy glanced over his shoulder as they turned a corner he caught a flash of orange hair and blue jackets. He urged Purpled to run faster.

One of the alleys opened into a main street. The sounds of the festival were still loud ahead of them and the moon was barely halfway through the sky. Tommy realized they probably hadn't been asleep long before the guards had found them. *But how had they found him?* He wondered, the thought bugging him.

"Get them!" The commanding voice of Fundy reached him and he pushed aside the thoughts for the moment, he needed to focus on escaping.

He stumbled slightly as Purpled yanked them towards through the alley opening and into a throng of people on the side of the road. They took a moment, panting like animals, trying to get their bearings. In front of them, a parade was passing, this one depicting the tale of shooting stars. Each of the dancers wore a headband of silver rods, looking like rays of starlight, while the mother moon wore a crescent moon mask that obscured half their face.

An idea struck Tommy suddenly. Glancing around them he spotted exactly what he was looking for. A small stall stood off to the side, lined with different kinds of silver and gold masks. Tommy grinned and began pulling Purpled towards it, weaving in and out of the crowds. He kept a close eye on the guards who'd broken through the alley and were now shoving people aside trying to find them.

Cursing under his breath he pointed towards the stall, hoping Purpled would understand his plan. He felt the boy next to him nod. Silently, they saddled up next to the stall, waiting for the merchant to be distracted by a customer for a moment before striking.

Tommy had improved his thievery skills since his first attempt with the Art of War all those weeks ago. Now his fingers grasped the cold silver of a half mask shaped like a cloud with chain-like raindrops falling off the bottom. He didn't waste a second putting it on his face as he walked away. When he turned he saw Purpled had grabbed a white domino mask painted with golden suns.

Neither of them stopped until they were safely within the clutches of the crowd once more. As a group of drunk men passed them, Purpled tripped into them pulling off one of their golden capes. He clasped it around Tommy's shoulders with a satisfied grin.

They continued to meander through the crowds, Tommy forcing himself to slow down to a normal pace. At one point a guard comes by, knocking into Purpled as he passes and Tommy holds his breath but the guard doesn't stop. They walk for a while but Tommy knows they need to stop at some point and find somewhere for the night.

"We need to find somewhere to sleep," Tommy kept his voice low, hidden amongst the murmur of the crowd.

Purpled nodded, "I know but I didn't grab any coins in our escape."

Tommy hissed. "Me neither and we spent all of Punz's money already."

"Shit, Punz is gonna kill us when he sees what happened at home," Purpled worried.

Tommy's eyes widened. "They broke the door," he whispered. "Punz loved that door!" They both groaned.

"Okay one thing at a time," Purpled shook his head. "Punz can only kill us if the guards don't get to us first."

Tommy nodded, "Okay, what about we crash at Hannah's?"

Purpled shook his head. "She's staying with Boomer remember? I don't want to have to explain why royal guards are chasing us to that toad. Besides Niki's not gonna be home tonight so we could just go back there?"

"I'm not risking bringing guards to Niki's home!" Tommy argued. "I can't do that to her."

"What about Ponk's house?"

"Ponk's house?" Tommy thought for a moment. No one would think to look for them in the upper city so it was probably their best bet at the moment. "You think he'll let us stay?"

Purpled shrugged, "Probably, at the very least he'll let us send a message to Punz. Maybe he'll kill us less if we let him know we're not already dead."

"Okay yeah," Tommy agreed, it was a smart plan. "Let's go to Ponk's place."

Slowly the boys began making their way closer to the upper city, zig-zagging through back alleys and trying to keep to the shadows. Tommy had lost sight of any guards a while back, but they stayed moving within the crowds as they reached the central plaza just to be safe before ducking into an alley to ditch the costumes.

Both boys took a moment to gather themselves before leaving the alley. They managed to get a few feet in the central plaza before a voice spoke up behind them.

“Prince Thomas, a pleasure to see you,” Tommy stilled at the sound of Fundy’s voice. He didn’t even have to turn around to know the man was grinning.

Purpled paused beside him and turned around, “Sorry man, think you got the wrong guy. I’m no prince.”

“No shit,” Tommy could hear the sneer in the aqua wielder’s voice. “I’m not talking to you. I’m talking to your friend over there.”

Tommy took a deep breath and turned around to face his brother’s guard. The wielder was leaned against a wall, arms crossed, and looking infuriatingly relaxed as if he wasn’t about to ruin Tommy’s night.

“You look a little lost Fundy, where’s Wilbur for you to cower behind?” Tommy sneered.

Fundy grinned back at Tommy, teeth glinting dangerously. “I’d hardly say I cower, your highness.” A small ball of water floated gently from the skin on his hip, thinning into a long bubble before coiling in on itself, *like a whip*. Tommy gritted his teeth, his cheek still stinging.

“I suppose you wouldn’t,” Tommy sniffed. “What do you want.”

Fundy scoffed, “Don’t play dumb with me. You’re wasting everyone’s time and the Empire’s very valuable resources.”

Now it was Tommy’s turn to scoff. “They can’t be too valuable if it’s taken this long to find me.”

“Perhaps they just weren’t looking,” Fundy said pleasantly.

Fundy’s words were just confirmation of what Tommy had already figured but they still stung. His family hadn’t been looking for him for weeks, they’d completely forgotten about him. *Fuck them*, he thought furiously. They have no right to his life anymore, how dare they send out search parties and disrupt his new life because they suddenly bothered to remember he existed.

“I’m not going back,” he snapped.

Fundy raised an eyebrow, “Your highness, you don’t have a choice.”

“Of course I do, tell Phil and Wilbur and Technoblade to fuck off and stay out of my life,” Tommy hissed.

“I don’t think I can do that,” Fundy shook his head. “His majesty is very concerned for your health and safety.”

“The old fuck forgot about me for weeks, I doubt he cares that much,” Tommy grit his teeth.

“That’s not true, his majesty has been very concerned. He thought you’d been kidnapped. It’s going to devastate him to hear you’ve run off all on your own,” Fundy smirked, his tone mocking.

“No wonder you ran away,” Purpled groaned.

Tommy jumped slightly as he remembered his friend beside him. Tommy grabbed at Purpled’s hand in an attempt to get him to *shut the fuck up because now Fundy was looking at him*. But his friend kept talking.

"Mr. Ginger Root over here thinks he's so cool for being able to stalk two kids during a festival, who *by the way* are just trying to get home to their very concerned brother. Why?" Purpled was talking very loudly Tommy realized, louder than normal, and people were starting to notice.

"You think you're above the law because you wear that stupid jacket," Purpled motioned towards the silver commander jacket Fundy wore. "Well, you're not! We didn't do anything so let us go home!"

A crowd was beginning to form and Tommy could see Fundy had moved away from the wall, his water lost its form for a moment before disappearing back into the skin. They'd made him nervous, Tommy grinned.

"Just let us go, okay!" Tommy chimed in, using his best puppy dog eyes. "We don't want any trouble our brother is going to be so worried."

The crowd was grumbling behind them, many of them clearly drunk and itching for a fight. Clearly, the people had some pent-up anger from the recent interruptions to their lives due to the influx of guards in the city. It was a fight Fundy clearly didn't want. The guard pushed fully away from the wall and stalked closer to them. For a second no one moved, no one breathed, as Fundy leaned down next to Tommy's ear.

"You've won a battle, not the war. We're bringing you back home one way or another, you better watch your back or better yet your little friend's," he whispered.

Tommy fought back the fear and anger that roiled within him at the threat towards Purpled and smirked. "You've been spending too much time with Techno," he whispered back.

Before Fundy had time to react, Tommy spun on his heel and marched through the crowd, pulling Purpled behind him as he shoved his way to freedom. He didn't even glance back once until they were through the crowd. When he did look back Fundy had disappeared, no doubt to update his family. He was so fucked.

"I thought they were supposed to save you," Purpled whispered beside him.

Tommy's steps faltered. "What?"

"The guards, that dick said your father thought you'd been kidnapped so weren't they coming to save you?"

Tommy shrugged, "I guess."

"Then why did he hit you?"

Tommy reached a hand up to feel the thin welt on his cheek, a parting gift from Fundy. "Fundy's just an asshole. We've never gotten along so I'm not surprised he took the first chance he could to leave a mark."

Purpled glared at the street, "I should have punched him."

The bluntness of the statement startled a laugh out of Tommy. "No, you most definitely should not. Fundy could probably have you executed for that," Tommy shook his head. "It's not worth it."

"You would be worth it," Purpled shrugged casually as if he hadn't just said he'd *die* for Tommy.

Tommy stopped, taking Purpled to his side when the boy continued moving. "Don't say that," Tommy demanded, the blackened face of his friend flickering in front of him. "I'm not worth that, promise me you won't throw your life away for me."

Purpled stared at him, face uncharacteristically serious. "I can't do that, Tommy," he said quietly. "Your my brother and I'd give my life if it meant I could save yours. You're worth everything to me, to Punz, to Niki, so don't say that shit."

Tears welled in Tommy's eyes. "Please, I can't live without you!" he begged, tugging Purpled closer until they were touching foreheads. One of Purpled's hands cupped the back of his head, pushing him closer.

"And I can't live with the thought of you hurting and me not doing anything about it."

Tommy laughed wetly, "You're such a sap."

"Yeah, we're both pretty big saps, huh?" Purpled laughed weakly.

Tommy pulled away gently. "Seriously though, don't do some stupid shit to protect my honor or whatever. Fundy's an asshole but he's a powerful asshole so just leave him alone. You've already got a target on your back now no need to make it any larger."

"Fine," Purpled huffed. "But if he tries to hurt you again I'm going to stuff him in a rubbish bin."

Tommy sighed, he'd take what he could get.

The two boys trudged the rest of the way through the upper city to the main square silently. When they finally reached Ponk's place it was past midnight and the festival had long since left this part of the city. The streets were quiet and dark as they approached the familiar townhouse.

Tommy sagged against his friend, the adrenaline finally wearing off as exhaustion settled into his bones. Suddenly Tommy was having a very hard time remaining upright, dark spots dancing across his vision. He opened his mouth to warn Purpled as the door in front of them opened. The bright hall light was the last thing Tommy saw before he fell into darkness.

He woke up the next morning in a bed that was much too comfortable to be Purpled's and much too quiet to still be in the Tavern. He bolted out of the bed only to sink to his knees when black spots danced in front of him. He groaned lightly, blindly grasping for the bed as

he waited for the spots to recede. He was able to pull himself back up into bed when the door opened.

In walked Purpled looking far too chipper for the morning, carrying a glass of water and a plate of toast. "Wakey, wakey," he chirped.

Tommy groaned in response accepting the food as it was handed to him, happily taking a large bite. "What happened?" he asked around a mouthful of toast.

"You passed out when we got here last night," Purpled shrugged. "Ponk said you were just a bit dehydrated and tired too, so drink up." He shoved the glass of water into Tommy's hand.

The events of last night ran through his head: the awful dream, fleeing the tavern, *Fundy*. Shit, his family were going to be pissed if they found him. Tommy groaned, flopping an arm over his eyes dramatically.

"Kill me now," he cried.

Purpled snorted but shook his head, "Sadly there are a few people ahead of me in line. Speaking of which, Niki's waiting for us downstairs. Punz said she was super worried when she came home to an empty house."

Tommy cringed at the thought upsetting Niki. "On second thought, I'm just going to go back to sleep." He tried to wrestle the sheet over top of his head again but Purpled just yanked it back down.

"Nuh-uh," Purpled clucked, "It's almost midday, Ponk told me to wake you up himself."

"Nope," Tommy shook his head. "I'm a growing boy, I need my sleep."

"Oh well, guess I'll have to send Karl away. What a shame, he's been waiting all day to see you," Purpled sighed.

"Karl's here?" Tommy leaped out of bed once more, using Purpled to steady himself this time.

"Stars, watch it!" Purpled griped but kept a hand on Tommy's shoulder as he led him out of the room and downstairs.

Tommy stumbled his way into the kitchen which turned out to be quite crowded. Niki was obviously there, sitting at the table and nursing a mug of something (probably coffee judging by the bags under her eyes). Dream sat across from her with George at his side and they all seemed to be laughing at something. Ponk and Sapnap had taken the chairs against the bar but had swiveled them around to face the group. Karl and Foolish were closer towards the back of the room, their conversation hushed as they bent over the counter. Punz was standing by the door, leaning against its frame.

It was Punz who noticed them first and gave the boys a strained smile, his dark circles were almost as bad as Niki's. Tommy cringed internally knowing how much stress he'd probably caused everyone.

"Whatever you're thinking, stop it," Punz grunted as he shoved Tommy into the seat next to Niki. He shot a pleading look to Purpled who stayed near the door, out of reach of the tired pink-haired girl. Tommy narrowed his eyes at his friend, *traitor*.

"What? How do you know what I'm thinking bitch?" Tommy spluttered.

Punz ignored his whining in favor of shoving another piece of toast towards him. Tommy definitely did *not* pout.

Niki ruffled his hair, ignoring his grumbling, "You had me worried, kid, leave a note next time you decide to get chased through the city."

Tommy snorted, “Sure, I’ll even address it to you and sign off as the Royal Prince Theseus, the courier of moonlight.”

“No way is that you’re fucking title,” Purpled grumbled at the same time Niki rapped the back of his head as she scolded him. “Watch the tone. One of us was up all night looking for the other while he got a nice nap.”

Tommy frowned at her words, “I am sorry about that, you shouldn’t have to worry about me
___”

Niki held a hand up, “I’m going to stop you there, Tommy. You’re family and you’re Tommy so I’m always going to worry about you. Worrying about you is not some punishment or burden to me. You’re my brother, Tommy, and I’m grateful I was given the chance to worry over you.”

Tommy knew his mouth was open but he was too shocked to care. He knew he’d seen Niki as a sister, the same way he saw Punz and Purpled as brothers, but he didn’t think she felt the same way.

“I—uh thanks, I mean same,” he stuttered. “Shit, I mean like thanks Niki, you’re my sister too.”

“Oh Tommy,” Niki laughed but it sounded suspiciously wet, like she was holding back tears, and she opened her arms for a hug. Tommy didn’t waste a second darting forward into Niki’s (*his sister’s, he thought breathlessly, he’d always wanted a sister*) embrace.

They hugged for a moment, Tommy basking in her warmth before Tommy pulled back and turned to face the rest of the group. They all looked rather worse for wear, sporting dark bags under their eyes and tired smiles. He realized they’d probably all been out looking for him and Purpled earlier.

“Sorry for wasting your nights,” Tommy mumbled.

George groaned. “You literally just had this conversation with Niki. We’re family, it wasn’t a waste of a night to make sure you were safe.”

Tommy stared at him, eyes wide. “We’re brothers, Gogy?”

Sapnap snorted as George just rolled his eyes. “Cousins,” he sniffed. “Twice removed.” The brunette turned back to his coffee cup, ignoring Dream’s soft looks.

“Family?” Tommy whispered quietly, an unspoken question in the word.

“You’re stuck with us now,” Ponk laughed, a bright smile dancing across his face.

Tommy glanced around the crowded kitchen, looking at the faces of the people who have chosen him. They wanted Tommy; loud, rambunctious Tommy who jammed as many curses into a sentence as he could and attracted danger like moths to light. They didn’t care about his wielding or his status, they didn’t feel forced to love him. They freely chose to love him despite everything he did and Tommy couldn’t feel more grateful. He had a family, one that loved him for him without conditions. He grinned brightly (and everyone else in that room swore they saw pure sunlight just for a moment).

“Does family get more pancakes?” Purpled asked.

“Pancakes?” Tommy hadn’t been told about pancakes, he’d just gotten toast.

Ponk shook his head, “Boys who pass out don’t get sugary breakfast.”

Tommy squawked, “What? That’s not fair!”

“C’mon Ponk, just let ‘em eat cake,” Sapnap jeered.

“Nope, nu-uh,” Ponk shook his head. “My house, my patient, my rules.”

Tommy shot Dream some well-executed puppy dog eyes but the older just returned a sympathetic gaze but said nothing. The man had been awfully quiet all morning. Tommy hummed slightly, something was up.

As conversation started back up around them, Tommy turned to the knight. “What’s wrong?” he asked.

Dream appeared startled for a moment, “What do you mean?”

“Cut the shit, you’ve been quiet all morning. What’s going on?” What could Dream know that has him so on edge. Then it dawned on him, Dream was supposed to be helping his family hunt him down. He hissed slightly, “You were at the castle this morning weren’t you?”

The knight let out a heavy sigh but nodded, “Yeah, Fundy broke the news to your father. He was—well, let’s just say he didn’t take the news well. I think he threw a paperweight. Techno’s pretty pissed too but he’s just putting more energy into training which totally makes my life harder, I still have to fight him in a few days—”

“Focus,” Tommy interrupted.

“Right, sorry. Wilbur’s thrown himself into work so we’ll need to be careful over the next few days. He’s keeping an eye on the docks and the gates so you probably shouldn’t leave anytime soon. My mom was asking me to start recruiting a team to find you before you had the chance to run again.”

“Why would I leave anyway?” Tommy shook his head. “I don’t want to leave this.”

“Because they’ll never stop looking for you,” Dream eyed him carefully as he said this. “If you stay, they’ll find you and who knows what they’ll do then.”

Tommy gulped, he hadn't quite thought that far ahead. "Shit," he mumbled.

"No point in worrying about it now, you couldn't get out even if you wanted to" Dream placed a gentle hand on his shoulder. "Besides, when all this blows over they'll always be a spot open for you on my crew if you want."

Tommy was touched, Dream trusted his crew implicitly. He'd seen how close they all were, Dream thought of them all as his brothers. Tommy was immensely grateful that Dream found him worthy of such a thing but, "I'm not leaving Purpled behind." *He couldn't*.

Dream smiled, seemingly unsurprised, "I wouldn't ask you to." And with that, the man turned slinging an arm around George's shoulder. Tommy stared after the man for a moment, gaping.

It was too early for this much love, Tommy decided.

"Tommy," the boy perked up at his name. He glanced around to see who'd called for him. It took him a second to realize it was Karl. The man hadn't moved from his spot hunched over the counter with Foolish but he was waving Tommy over. He obliged and began moving towards the timekeeper and as he got closer, Tommy saw his scroll between the men.

Foolish looked up as he approached, "You should see this."

Chapter End Notes

hi come yell at me on my [twitter](#) :) sorry the update was a few days later than i said, i'm in the middle of midterms so my life is crazy but i hope everyone liked this chapter, it was a bit of a rollercoaster (also my first time writing any sort of heavy angst/nightmare sequence so that was new) let me know what you thought!

the plan is simple

Chapter Summary

Tommy finally begins to plan his future while his family is getting increasingly more desperate to find him. Tommy's new friends are beginning to work together but will their plan succeed?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Foolish looked up as he approached, “You should see this.”

“What is it?” Tommy asked peering over Karl’s shoulder at the scrap of paper, which now seemed to have significantly more writing on it. “Woah, what’s all that?”

“I talked with some old friends who were— uh are pretty well-versed in the old languages,” Karl told him. “They told me this could have only come from during Queen Henna’s reign.”

Tommy furrowed his brow, a dusty classroom flickered in the back of his mind. His tutor’s voice was faint, ‘*Queen Henna, otherwise known as the Dark Queen, was the only reigning monarch of the Empire to not have been gifted with magic. Because of this, she dedicated her time to the eradication of such things, including the existence of wielders. She even tried to kill her own son when she discovered his wielding potential. The years of her reign were filled with fear, bloodshed, and unrelenting cruelty.*’

“Didn’t she outlaw magic or some shit?” Tommy questioned.

Karl nodded. “Yeah but that doesn’t mean it stopped existing. Wielders and magic users all fled. A few established monasteries outside of the Dark Queen’s reach and they studied magic more intensely. They created new forms of wielding, and some believed it to be a golden age of magical study.”

“Why does it sound like there’s a but coming?” Purpled grumbled.

Karl smiled sheepishly, “But, most of it was lost to time because of the secrecy and paranoia of the time. Many of these monasteries wrote their teachings into scrolls and books using ciphers. This—” Karl pointed towards the scroll on the table, “is one such scroll.”

Tommy’s jaw dropped. Skeppy had given him a scroll with secret and ancient forms of wielding?

“Wait, you’re telling me Tommy can just decode this scroll, and bam, he’s got access to secret wielding?” Purpled asked disbelief laced his words.

Foolish shrugged, “Kind of? I mean the only way to get the key for the cipher would be to find the original monastery that wrote it and look at their records. But most of those monasteries have been abandoned since the fall of the Dark Queen.”

Tommy groaned, “So it’s useless.” *What a waste of time.*

“Well, not entirely,” Sapnap broke in, “The monasteries might be abandoned but they weren’t destroyed, most are still intact. We could always try and find wherever this one came from,” he tapped on the scroll.

“Ooo, I’m in! I miss adventuring,” Ponk smiled.

“I mean it would take a few days to get the ship up and running but if we start now and work quickly we could probably be set sail in a day or so,” Sapnap chimed in.

“Hold on,” Dream put a hand up, silencing everyone. “Tommy’s not leaving the city anytime soon. The port is crawling with guards searching every ship and besides, we—” he motioned towards Sapnap, George, and himself, “are supposed to be leading Tommy’s manhunt.”

Tommy sunk further into his seat, huffing slightly.

George sighed loudly, “Fine, we’ll figure out a plan to get the royals off Tommy’s tail, then we leave.”

“Wow,” Punz snarked. “It almost sounds easy when you say it like that.”

“Guys, I’m serious,” Dream huffed. “My mom’s expecting me to actually help, she’s already getting suspicious that we haven’t found Tommy yet. We need to wait if we’re going to smuggle Tommy out of here.”

“Also, you have the match against Tech—uhm the Blood God,” Foolish cringed.

Wait a goddamn minute! “Techno’s the Blood God?” Tommy screeched.

All the adults in the room shared an easy glance before Dream spoke up, “Pfft, what? No way the future general of the Empire fights in lowly bending matches.”

George rolled his eyes, “Real subtle.”

“Those fuckers,” Tommy hissed. “First Wilbur decides it’s cool to sing in grimy taverns and now it turns out that Techno-fucking-blade literally fights in league matches. But no, somehow, I’m still the disappointment! What’s next Tubbo works at the fucking library?”

“Wilbur does what?” Dream asked, his voice strained, while the rest of the room erupted into laughter.

“If it makes you feel any better, I had no idea the Blood God was Prince Techno,” Purpled shrugged.

Punz shoved the blonde. “Yeah, ‘cause you can’t keep a secret to save your life,” he grinned.

“Fuck you!”

“Remind me to never work personal security for any of you,” Sapnap said, patting Tommy’s shoulder.

“Getting back on track,” Dream interrupted, calming everyone down. “We need a real plan, not some half-baked idea that’ll end up with at least four of us getting hanged for treason.”

“It’s hung,” Foolish corrected. “Not hanged, we’d be hung.”

George brought his hand up to rub circles into his forehead. “No, it’s really not.”

“What do you mean? It’s hung,” Foolish insisted.

“Nah, it’s hanged,” Punz shook his head.

“Yeah, a painting is hung but people are hanged,” Karl chimed in.

Sapnap raised a hand, waiting until everyone looked at him before saying, “Guys, who gives a shit?”

“You guys are impossible,” Dream sighed. “Anyways, does anyone have a plan that does not end in our unfortunate demise?”

“Sapnap and I can lead the hunt for Tommy while you focus on training the wimpy prince,” George began, ignoring Tommy’s outraged cries. “We can just tell your mom that you’re training for the match.”

“Yeah, she’ll totally believe that. She knows how competitive you are,” Sapnap nodded eagerly.

Dream nodded thoughtfully, “That could work, but someone has to prep the ship.”

“Please, Foolish and I can do that in our sleep,” Ponk scoffed. “We can be ready to leave the morning after the match.”

“I can get you ingredients and help with the food stores,” Niki piped up.

“I can help run errands,” Purpled chimed in.

“I’ll see if I can narrow down what monasteries the scroll may have originated from,” Karl added.

Tears had begun to well in Tommy’s eyes. It was overwhelming, the raw display of love and support. He couldn’t have ever imagined his unsupervised escapades would turn into this but he would be thanking the stars for the rest of his life. For so long family had meant nothing to him but a crown and quiet rooms. Now it had become something to fight for, someone to protect.

“Thank you,” he sniffed. “I don’t think I’ll ever be able to explain how much this means.”

Purpled rolled his eyes, “Whatever, this is nothing! I’d help you do much worse than this.”

Punz scoffed, “Oh yeah, like what?”

His brother paused for a moment, seemingly thinking of something awful to be an accomplice in. “I’d help bury a body,” he said, crossing his arms resolutely.

“Only one? What if there were two bodies?” Tommy asked, curious now.

“Well, maybe a few bodies but no more than 5,” Purpled sniffed.

“Can we stop talking about burying dead bodies?” Dream asked, sounding completely fed up with them.

Tommy shrugged, “Whatever you say, boss man.”

They broke up after that. Niki took him home to shower and grab a spare set of clothes, Dream had followed a bit later and took Tommy off to train. Purpled and Punz said they needed to fix up their apartment and grab some things before any guards came back. George and Sapnap had said they were going to meet with some of the castle guards to start the ‘search’ for Tommy. Even Foolish, Karl, and Ponk had all headed down to the ship to start preparations.

The next few days were brutal. Between the constant anxiety and excitement, Tommy was just ready to get the fuck out of the Empire. Dream had increased the intensity of their wielding training too, so Tommy was near exhausted all the time. But despite all this Tommy was happy. Happier than he’d ever been in the castle, he finally could see a future for himself. He would be an adventurer, he’d find lost cities and more riches than he could possibly know what to do with.

There was still a note of uncertainty to everything. What if they couldn’t get out of port? What if the monasteries Karl found weren’t the one they were looking for? What if something happens to them out there? There were no guarantees in this path of life but Tommy thought it wasn’t so bad, he kind of liked all the excitement.

All he needed was the reassurance that no matter what he’d always have his family.

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Technoblade had all but worn a divot into the carpet with his pacing and it was beginning to stress Wilbur out. They had yet to find their littlest brother and they were all on edge, even Tubbo seemed to be more snappish as of late. Still, that was no reason to ruin a 300-year-old carpet.

“Sit down, will you!” he snapped at his brother.

Tubbo looked up from his letters towards the commotion but quickly returned his attention to the papers in front of him with a shake of his head. Techno on the other hand did not even pause his actions.

“I don’t know how either of you can just be sitting there,” Techno huffed. “Theseus is out there, probably hurt and scared and we’re just in here, what? Reading?”

Wilbur glanced down at the shipping logs he had in his lap and sighed. He understood his brother’s agitation, he’d much prefer to be out there searching for his brother but, “You know what dad said. The Hunters don’t want any interference, we have to trust Ant and Dream to bring Theseus home.”

“I think it’s pretty clear, Tommy doesn’t want to come home,” Tubbo muttered.

Wilbur whirled his head around to face the kid. “It doesn’t matter what he *wants*,” Wilbur sneered. “He needs to be with us, where he’s safe!”

“I’m just saying, based on what Fundy told us, Tommy’s not going to come willingly,” Tubbo shrugged. “Maybe we just give him time, let him come to us.”

Techno shook his head, “No way, Theseus is too stubborn, he’ll never come home.”

“Technoblade,” their dad’s sudden appearance made all three boys jump, his voice booming in the quiet room. “Shouldn’t you be practicing for tomorrow?”

The man in question nodded his head slowly, “Maybe but we’re trying to—”

Phil tutted, “Nu-uh, no excuses. Theseus will be found in due time, I have complete faith that the Hunters will do their job. I think it best if you go practice now. And the rest of you should find things to busy yourselves with as well, no point in worrying ourselves needlessly. Tommy will be returned home safe and sound in a matter of days.”

Techno sighed but nodded and bowed on his way out. Wilbur understood his brother’s uncertainty. On one hand, he didn’t doubt his father’s choices, the Hunters were ruthless. They tracked their targets across land and sea, relentless in their motivation. It’s why Dream had been such a good leader, the man was more stubborn than anyone Wilbur had ever met. It made him a fearsome opponent and a wonderful ally. On the other hand, Dream seemed a bit distracted as of late. He’d overheard Puffy mention how the head hunter had allowed Sapnap to take the lead on the hunt for the next few days in preparation for the big fight.

It made Wilbur antsy, he wanted his brother found sooner rather than later. All he could hope for was Techno beating Dream tomorrow so the man could put his sole focus on finding their little brother.

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“Tommy, don’t you dare,” Dream screeched, blasting away another ball of mud. “STOP!”

Tommy cackled from the back of his side, dunking another ball of dirt into the water. “Never bitch!”

Dream blasted away another that had gotten closer than the rest. Suddenly the ground from under Tommy disappeared. He squealed-yelled out, unconsciously dropping his next dirtball as he glanced down to see the floor moving farther from him. It took him a moment to realize the floor wasn’t moving, he was! The air swirling beneath him, lifting him up, was Dream’s work.

“Fuck you,” he called down. “Let me down, bitch boy!”

He could see Dream bent over with laughter below him. “This is not funny!” he insisted.

“It definitely is,” Dream wheezed.

“Put me down!” Tommy demanded.

“Whatever you say, your highness,” Dream’s tone had twisted into something strange, almost mischievous and Tommy realized his mistake.

“Wait, wait no—” and then he was falling.

The fall was short, Dream had only lifted him a few feet off the ground, but it still knocked the wind out of him. “You’re a wrong ‘un, you know that?” Tommy grumbled, sitting up slowly.

Dream was still laughing, “You—your face, I need a portrait of that,” he wiped a tear from his eye.

“You are cruel man, Big D.”

“Hey, no don’t call me that!”

“Cruel? It’s true you enjoy making me suffer,” Tommy groaned.

“No, that name,” Dream sighed. “Whatever, I think it’s time to finish up here. Niki should be expecting you home soon so don’t stop by Purpled’s on your way back.”

Tommy groaned, “What? But I haven’t seen Purpled in forever!”

“Quit being clingy, you saw him yesterday and you’ll see him tomorrow.”

“I AM NOT CLINGY!”

“Shut up, child,” Dream groaned. “I’ll see you after the match and make sure you’ve got everything packed on the boat already, we’re not gonna have time to stop.”

Tommy rolled his eyes, “Yes, dad.”

Dream ruffled his hair in response and Tommy started gathering his stuff. He frowned when he realized Dream wasn’t doing the same. “Are you not coming?” he asked.

The knight shook his head. “I’m going to practice a bit more. I need all the help I can get for tomorrow,” he nodded towards the door, “Now get out of here before Niki comes with the pitchforks.”

Tommy laughed as he ducked out of the arena. He was starting to really enjoy training with Dream. For the first time, he was exploring the limits of his mana, creating walls taller than himself and even learning more offensive moves. Terra wielders were often seen as just defensive players, but Dream was helping him find new ways to surprise his opponents.

“If they aren’t expecting it, then they aren’t preparing for it and that’s how you win,” Dream had lectured as they’d run through warmups. “Let them underestimate you, it’ll just give you the advantage.”

Unlike all his previous tutors, Dream liked Tommy's stubborn aggression, he approved of Tommy's hunger to explore. In between lessons, the knight would tell him stories of his adventures. Tommy loved them and the closer they got to leaving, the more he was excited to create his own stories. As the excitement grew so did his anxiety.

They were playing a very dangerous game, one that could end with swinging bodies. Tommy was well aware of his father's reputation. Emperor Philza was a fierce ruler, a thing that served his empire well but often not its traitors. Tommy wasn't even sure he would be saved. His father would have heard Fundy's report by now and he might see Tommy's abdication as a sign of betrayal.

He pulled his cloak closer to him as he passed another group of soldiers. They lined the streets now, swords and crests on full display. Tommy shivered, the snow crunching underfoot. It had been snowing harder now that Spring had finally given way to the cold clutches of Summer.

Tommy skirted around another group of soldiers talking loudly about their latest arrest (which made Tommy scoff, they were supposed to be looking for him not arresting random citizens for 'not complying'). He ducked into Niki's bakery, shaking off the snow from his cloak as he hung it up.

There weren't many customers, but it was well past midday. There was an older lady in the corner and a man stood waiting at the counter. Niki was picking a few pastries out from the display and packing them up. She smiled at the man as she handed over the bag.

"There you go, Quackity," she smiled. The name was familiar, how did Tommy know that name? Perhaps he was one of Punz's associates, he had so many Tommy had stopped trying to keep them straight.

However, when the man turned around Tommy recognized him. Tommy froze as memories of that afternoon in Hannah's shop flitted through his head. Quackity's the same dude who was looking for him, well Prince Thomas him but probably also Tommy now too. Jeez, this was getting confusing. The large scar on his face was even worse under the store light. It puckered at the edges and Tommy could see where he was missing a tooth. It made him shiver.

Quackity also seemed to remember him, standing frozen staring at the teen across the shop from him. Neither seemed to want to make the first move. Eventually, it was Niki who broke the standoff.

"Hey, Tommy! How was training?" she asked, seemingly unaware of the tension between the two males.

Tommy cleared his throat, "Uh, good. Totally could kick the ass of the next dumb fuck who tries to kidnap me," he shot a glare towards Quackity who looked away.

Noticing his look, Niki brightened. "This is Quackity," she waved towards the man. "He's a regular here or at least was until he went on vacation but he's back now!"

"Vacation?" Tommy asked sarcastically. "Where did you go?"

Quackity scowled, "It was more of a stay-cation if you will."

"A stay-what now?" Tommy asked bewildered.

"A stay-cation, you know a vacation at home," Quackity grinned and despite himself, Tommy let out an amused huff.

Niki seemed to catch onto the weird tension between them, "Do you two know each other?"

"Yes," Tommy answered at the same time Quackity said, "No."

Niki looked between them raising her eyebrow suspiciously at them.

"He was the one who broke into Hannah's flower shop," Tommy immediately ratted him out, a smug smirk in place as Quackity glared at him.

Niki gasped, "Q! I thought we were done with all that!"

In Quackity's defense, though he didn't deserve one, he did look thoroughly cowed by Niki's scolding. "C'mon, Niki," he whined. "One of the princes just running about in the capital, how could I pass that opportunity up?"

"Easily," she sniffed, "And you didn't find any princes, did you? Just injured three teens, one of which is family," she motioned towards Tommy. He felt his heart warm with the distinction and stuck his tongue out at the man.

Quackity looked down sheepishly, "I didn't mean for things to go that far but I was just so close!"

"Well, I believe you owe Tommy an apology," she crossed her arms, eyes darting towards the boy meaningfully.

The wrong 'un in question let out a heavy sigh, "I'm sorry for attacking you and your friends. I didn't mean to let it get that bad, I just got caught up in the moment."

Tommy mulled over his words for a moment. He seemed genuine enough and he didn't seem to mean any more harm (as long as he didn't find out Tommy was the prince he'd been looking for). So Tommy nodded, "Fine, I'll forgive you just this once, Big Q, but if it happens again I'll have to notify the local au-thor-ities," he over-enunciated the last word.

Quackity gave him a strange look. "Big Q?" he asked.

"It's your name, innit?" Tommy grinned. "It's i-ronic because you're small and your name begins with Q."

“What the fuck—I’m not—I’m average you ass,” the man spluttered, puffing up his chest slightly.

“Alright,” Niki broke in, also grinning. “I’m glad we’ve got that settled. Anything else you need, Q?”

“Nah, I’ve got to get back to Charlie. He gets worried if I’m gone too long,” the man laughed gently.

“You know you should talk to Sapnap and Karl soon, I hear Sapnap’s leaving again so you don’t have much time,” Niki told the scarred man, placing a gentle hand on his arm. Tommy felt as though he was missing something based on the sudden change in Niki’s tone and Quackity’s demeanor. She was trying to be gentle, almost careful, and he was unbearably tense.

Quackity shrugged, “Some things are just better left in the past.”

“I’m not sure they’d agree,” Niki argued.

The man was quiet for a moment, before sighing, “I’ll think about it.” He ignored Niki’s grin as he turned for the door. “Thanks for the scones,” Quackity yelled over his shoulder. As he passed Tommy he paused and lowered his voice again, “Seriously though, sorry for dragging you into my mess. You seem like a good kid, you didn’t deserve to get messed up.”

“It’s alright, but if you don’t mind me asking why do you even want the prince?” Tommy asked.

Quackity bit his lip, thinking about his next words. “You see this?” he pointed towards his scar.

Tommy nodded, “Kinda hard to miss.”

“Prince Technoblade gave it to me in a rather unpleasant meeting. He took away half my sight and ruined any chance of happiness I could have had. I think it only fair I return the favor,” the man grinned sharply.

Tommy gulped, “Would you kill him, the other prince?”

Quackity shrugged, “Maybe, I don’t know. I guess I’ve got a lot to figure out.” He eyed Tommy up and down, “I guess we both do.” And before Tommy had a chance to respond Quackity pushed past him and out the door.

Tommy took a second to look towards Niki who was already staring at him with concern.

“Everything alright?” she asked.

Tommy bit his cheek before nodding, “Yeah, just figuring each other out I guess.”

Niki nodded, “Quackity’s a good guy, he’s just had a rough few years. Your brother really did a number on him.”

“What did he mean when he said Techno ruined his chance at happiness?”

Niki sighed, placing the towel she’d been wiping her hands with down. “It’s a long story that still hasn’t quite ended. Quackity grew up in one of the ramshackle towns—” Tommy sucked in a breath. Wilbur had once explained to him about ramshackle towns and how they were mainly just alleys or plots of abandoned land throughout the city that vagrants took over and built communities within. Purpled had said it was a better alternative to living on the streets alone but he could remember Techno had hated them, said they brought crime and gave the city a bad name.

“Apparently, Prince Technoblade had been the one to close it down a few years back, brought in a bunch of knights and everything. Rumors say it was a nasty fight for both sides. Quackity lost quite a few friends that night.”

“Is that how Quackity got that scar?” Tommy asked.

“No, that came later.” Niki shook her head. “About three years ago, Quackity entered in one of those official sword fighting tournaments and got far enough to duke it out with your brother. That’s where he got it, the prince gave him one long slash to the face and I spent months fixing him back up,” she grimaced.

Tommy scrunched his brow in confusion, something didn’t add up. “You said he was from a ramshackle. Those competitions are for noble families only, how was he allowed to compete?”

Niki smirked slightly, “He’d spent two years tricking everyone into thinking he was a third-born son from this baron out in the countryside—” Tommy scoffed, *people bought that?* “He had a crest and everything. I’ve got no idea how he managed it, but he did. He’s just got this crazy luck sometimes. That’s how he met Sapnap and Karl.”

“Aren’t Sapnap and Karl like—a thing? How does Quackity fit into that?” Tommy asked, thoroughly confused.

Niki laughed as she walked around the counter. “I guess they were all a *thing* for a while then things got complicated,” her smile slipped. “Sapnap never stayed long, Dream always calling him back to the next hunt and Karl started holing himself up in his library doing stars knows what. The straw that broke them though was them finding out about Quackity’s deception.”

Tommy stifled his gasp, “But how did they find out?”

“I guess Prince Technoblade had done some research on his opponents—” Tommy snorted, that was such a Techno move. “and found out Quackity’s story was false.”

Niki tucked Tommy into her side and led him into the back. “He outed Q in front of the entire court and disgraced him. Sapnap and Karl had been in the audience. I don’t know what happened after that, Q doesn’t talk about it much but I do know he blames your brother for his life going to shit after that.”

Tommy frowned, “It seems so needlessly cruel. Why couldn’t Tech have just beat him and let it lay?”

Niki shrugged, “Sometimes the things other people do, the lengths they will go to, to protect the things that are important to them don’t always make sense to us.” She shoved him towards the stairs. “Now shower, you stink. We’ll head out for the Arena in a few hours and you still need to finish packing.”

Tommy nodded, disappearing up the stairs as quickly as he could. All thoughts of love triangles and his seemingly sadistic brother were replaced with his excitement towards tonight’s match.

Chapter End Notes

to alleviate any confusion the seasons are basically the opposite bc i meant for everything to happen during winter but then I threw in the spring festival which was a real oopsy on my part lol. anyway hope everyone enjoyed, sorry for the wait i had some writer's block then my computer decided it couldn't handle itself. thanks for reading and if you want to keep updated check out my [twitter](#) :)

the match of a century

Chapter Summary

Tommy finally gets to see Dream and Techno fight. With high hopes and a bright future ahead of him, Tommy can't imagine anything going wrong now.

Chapter Notes

TW: a little blood and fighting throughout the chapter

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The Arena was so crowded Tommy couldn't make it a foot without bumping into someone new. Purpled had said this would be the biggest match of the century but this was insane. Tommy had never even seen this many people before, he didn't even know there were this many people in the capital! It was like 8 Equinox balls put together.

Tommy grimaced as he bumped into another green-clad fan. He found himself wishing once again, that Dream had a different favorite color. There were hundreds of people streaming around him dressed either in that obnoxious shade of green or blood red. The clashing colors were giving him a migraine.

He and Purpled had tried to escape the oppressive noise of the main arena by using the restroom, only to find out the bathrooms were more crowded than the arena itself. The number of vendors who lined the lobby area was absurd. Every three feet there was someone selling something. So far Tommy had acquired some sort of meat on a stick, a bright green sash, and a few funny looking coins from some lady wearing a hat with an *animal* on it.

Eventually, they were able to fight through the crowds, him chasing after Purpled who possessed that annoying ability to just slip through crowds. He wasn't too far behind though, careful to keep his friend's back within his sights. Tommy couldn't afford to get lost now, not with the match starting and they hadn't even found their seats yet.

This time around Dream had reserved them all seats in the actual audience, good seats too, not quite front row but just a few rows back. Tommy swore he could feel the sweat fly off the wielders in front of him. The first few matches had been intense, tempers flaring as the crowd cheered on the wielders. There had been a few fists launched after a particularly brutal singles round, the crowd had only cheered louder until the refs were able to separate the fighters. The energy in the stadium was electric, the heat and excitement building with every match, but everyone knew it was just a taste of what was to come.

As the winners of the final complimentary match took their bows, Tommy could feel the crowd start to buzz. The lights dimmed, bodies seemed to lean forward ever so slightly, and the whispers grew to a loud rumble. Tommy could feel the ground shift under his feet. The moment everyone was waiting for was approaching. An announcer, a man who'd introduced himself as Sneeg earlier, waltzed into the center of the court. His blue hair peeked out from underneath his hood and he was swinging an oversized matching blue hammer that seemed to crackle with electricity, Tommy realized belatedly that it also matched the mask that covered the top half of his face.

Sneeg threw off the hood revealing a sharp grin and began to speak, "Ladies, gents, kind viewers, and bloodthirsty fans how are we feeling tonight?"

The crowd screamed, and the noise manifested into something almost physical, beating into Tommy's back. It was invigorating, and Tommy allowed himself to join in. He glanced over to his side and caught Purpled's amused stare, all the once prince offered was a manic grin.

"Now, tonight we have the match-up of the century," Sneeg paused letting the cheers of the crowd rise and fall once more. The announcer grinned, "On the gold side we have the reigning champion, blood letter supreme, the vicious, the cruel, BLOOD GOD."

The stadium shook with the shouts of the crowd, some cheering, some booing (Tommy was amongst the latter of course). The seats shook with the force of the crowd stomping and hollering. Tommy felt himself give way to the energy, no longer focused on those next to him but instead focused on the trapdoors on the far side of the court.

They swung open with a bang and Techno strode up the stairs with an air of practiced confidence. His hair had been braided, gold woven throughout almost as if a mock crown, and the red cloak that Tommy had seen on the poster rested across his shoulders, making them appear wider than they were. Surprisingly enough he wore no jewelry, his fingers were

empty of all rings, and there were no chains around his neck. The only piece he wore seemed to be two drooping gold chains from his ears.

The most striking part of the costume, however, was the mask. It sat over the top half of his face, allowing full view of his mouth which was stretched into a grimace. At first glance, it appeared to be the skull of a large boar of some sort but when Tommy looked closer he realized what it really was—it was a hoglin skull. Tommy snorted, could his brother be any less obvious?

“What’s that, Tech?” A young Prince Theseus asked, rolling his older brother’s signet ring around his hand. Instead of the raven like his father’s and eldest brother’s rings, Technoblade’s ring had a frightening beast imprinted in the gold. It looked almost like a cross between a boar and a pig.

“It’s a hoglin,” his brother explained. “It’s my house’s crest.”

“No, it’s not, we’re ravens,” Tommy argued, crossing his arms. “Death knows no bounds,” he recited the Craft mantra.

“I’m no Craft, Thes,” Techno reminded him. “I am a Blade, an orphan, an outcast.”

The young prince shook his head, “You’re my brother,” he insisted.

Techno smiled down at him fondly, allowing himself to enjoy the innocent love of a child. “Be that as it may, blood does not lie. I am not a Craft so I needed my own crest, Phill allowed me to choose a mascot so I chose a hoglin.”

“What’s a hooglin?”

Techno laughed gently. “Hoglin,” he corrected. “It’s a hellish creature with a hide as thick as steel, pierced only by the one fated to kill it, and even then, it is not easy. It takes as many as 20 men to just hold the beast down. Legend says they crawled into the overworld from the

Nether and carry the same hate for overworlds that all Nether creatures have. They're quick to tear flesh from bone if you get too close," Techno warned.

Tommy felt himself tremble at his brother's description. "It sounds horrible, why would you choose that beast?"

The grin that spread across his face was nothing short of vicious. "They're said to be an omen of war and justice, a beast for savages and outcasts. I can't think of a better animal to represent my legacy."

Tommy rolled his eyes at his brother's dramatics, "It looks like a pig," he declared, the surest he'd been about anything in his entire 8-year existence.

Techno doubled over laughing, "Never change, Thes, never change."

Tommy smiled ruefully, it would seem they all changed. Suddenly he was hit with a wave of longing, his heart ached for them in a way he hadn't been expecting. This was the closest he'd been to any of his brothers since seeing Wilbur all those weeks ago. A sharp elbow to his side brought him back to the present, a wave of shouts and cheers crashed over him, weighing his feet to the floor.

He glanced over to see Purpled eyeing him curiously, he shot his friend a grin and a thumbs up. Elbowing him back twice as hard when Purpled still seemed unsure, starting an elbowing war. A loud cheer erupted around them, and Tommy quickly turned his attention back to the court.

Techno had taken off his cloak, revealing the most boring costume Tommy had ever seen. He wore plain, black cotton pants and a loose white shirt, the only color on the man was his bright pink hair. The future general was rolling a ball of fire across his fingertips before throwing it up, the crowd watched in glee as it exploded into a dragon above their heads.

He put on a good show, Tommy knew he was just as dramatic as Wilbur when he wanted to be. However, something was off with the general. If Tommy hadn't grown up with him, he might've missed the slight hunch of his shoulders or the way his hand twitched like when he

was tired, but Tommy had so he saw all of it. Tommy couldn't see under the mask but if he could, he knew he'd find bags. Techno looked like shit.

Tommy grinned, wide and only slightly bloodthirsty, he couldn't wait for Dream to trounce the Blood God.

"On the silver side, we've got fresh blood, a new competitor whose been absolutely dominating in the multi-matches. His record unmatched, his rise to notoriety unheard of, and his face unseen. We have the mysterious, the cunning, the elusive DREAM," Sneeg's hand shot out towards the other set of trap doors.

The doors opened with a soft whoosh and for a moment nothing happened. The stadium was silent, each person leaning off their seats, craning to get a view of the doors. A collective breath was held, waiting for something, *anything*, to happen. When all of a sudden, a streak of green shot out from the doors.

Dream flipped seamlessly through the air, displacing the air around him to move him forward. He hovered for a moment, porcelain mask gleaming as Dream twisted in the air, before dropping back to the ground, allowing air to swirl the dust up and away from him. His cloak fluttered behind him before flying off into the air, twisting and turning until it disappeared below the trapdoor. The master wielder faced the crowds waving, and Tommy knew he was grinning under the mask. The crowd roared its approval.

When the people finally settled, Sneeg began speaking once more. "All right, we're going to have a clean, fair match tonight. No using secondaries, no grievous injuries, you know the rules!"

Sneeg took a step back, motioning for the two wielders to meet at the center line. Both competitors stepped up to the red line, eyes never leaving the others as they approached. It was Techno who stuck his hand out first and as Dream took it, he pulled the other in closer, whispering something the crowd couldn't hear. When his brother leaned back Tommy could see Dream clenching his fist, whatever he'd said had clearly pissed off Dream.

The crowd, however, loved the display. The cheers grew impossibly louder and Tommy could feel his skull vibrate as the sounds passed through him. Dream took a step back, tearing his arm free from Techno's grasp. Tommy watched Techno's smirk widen, clearly satisfied with

the reaction. They both marched to their respective starting positions, waiting for the starting bell.

Sneeg watched their interaction was a surprised grin but shrugged, facing the audience again. “Well, it seems our wielders are ready, are you?” he asked, cupping a hand to his ear. When the crowd went wild, he nodded seriously. “I guess you are. Let’s start this thing!”

As he finished, he swung his heavy hammer against the starting bell, a sharp ding ringing throughout the stadium. For a moment nothing happened, the crowd waited with bated breath as each wielder was tensed, circling each other. Both were coiled in on themselves, waiting to strike. Then all of a sudden, they snapped.

Dream twisted the wind around to form a swirling tornado and flung it towards Techno’s side. In return, Techno shot a column of flame as he twisted out of the way of Dream’s small tornado. The air continued to spin, catching some of the flames causing them to grow and move with it. Techno danced out of the way, shooting fireballs the entire time. Tommy could tell Dream was being careful not to keep his movement predictable, always twisting and turning in different directions. It was an effective strategy he’d taught Tommy, ‘*if they don’t know where you’ll be then they can’t hit you.*’

Dream leaped across the court, landing with a summersault as he threw a hand out creating a thin vortex of air that blasted Techno where he stood.

“It looks like Dream gets first hit with that powerful wind vortex!” Sneeg shouted above the roar of the crowd.

The fire wielder only stumbled back a few steps, but Tommy could see his snarl as he righted himself. It was official Techno was pissed. He dodged the fiery tornado behind him once more as Techno reached behind him. When he snapped his hand forward, a burst of soul fire streamed straight toward Dream. The green-clad man wasn’t quick enough, the edge of his shirt lighting on fire.

Dream’s focus shifted towards putting out the flames and the tornado dissipated. Tommy gritted his teeth, it was a bit of a dirty move but totally fair. Maybe Tommy hadn’t quite anticipated how fair a fight this would be. It’s not his fault he hadn’t seen Techno bend in months, well maybe it was a *little* bit.

"And there goes the Dream's advantage! It's getting hot in here, looks like someone should invest in some fireproof cloaks," the announcer laughed. Tommy booed alongside some of the crowd.

Dream's fists clenched as he panted slightly, it was clear the fight was using a great deal of his mana. The only consolation was Techno seemed to be equally as out of breath. That didn't stop the Blood God from launching another set of fireballs though.

In his attempt to dodge the onslaught of flames, Dream danced through the air only to come crashing down inches from the border. The crowd seized as the wielder seemed to teeter for a second before regaining his balance and spinning back to the fight. Dream returned fire with a few short but powerful air blasts that knocked Techno back a few more inches.

They continued to trade blows, neither making much progress until Dream launched another tornado of wind. This one was smaller than the first, Dream was clearly drained, but so was Techno. Tommy watched as one of Techno's arms got twisted in the swirling wind and shoved him to the side, almost out of bounds. He landed in a heap only a few meters away from Tommy. Tommy watched in horror as his brother looked up, making direct eye contact with Tommy.

For a second, one precious moment, the world stopped and Tommy prayed Techno wouldn't see him, too addled by the fight and pumped with adrenaline. Then recognition flashed behind the mask and the world started up again, the roar of the crowd came crashing back in. Techno's mouth opened to say something but a torrent of wind cut him off.

Dream had scraped up enough mana to create a wall of wind, shoving it across the center line and pushing Techno just a hair out of bounds. Another bell rang throughout the arena and Tommy could hear the announcer saying something, but Tommy couldn't make out the words through his panic.

He gripped Purpled's arm tight, but he refused to tear his eyes off Techno. He wanted to cry, they were so close to being free, so close. It was not going to end here, Tommy wouldn't allow it.

Techno stood up, beginning to reach for Tommy in the crowd but those in front of him reached for the hand instead. Tommy took the distraction for what it was and bolted, dragging Purpled behind him. They ducked, ignoring the screams sounding from behind them.

They flew through the packed stadium and out into the halls that led towards the lobby, a few guards looked up eyeing them suspiciously as they stumbled into view. Tommy felt Purpled tugging him in the opposite direction and allowed himself to be pulled away. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw a young soldier in royal blue race up to guards motioning wildly. The two guards' gazes snapped toward them as they began to sit up.

"Hey, wait—" one guard started but Tommy had no desire to listen, instead pushing Purpled ahead of him faster.

They turned another corner, skidding to a stop at a fork in the hall. A group of royal soldiers came marching down the left tunnel and Tommy could still hear the heavy footsteps of the guard behind them so he quickly yanked Purpled to the right. They raced down the hall until they hit the lobby. Tommy started to dart towards the doors before Purpled quickly yanked him behind a column.

"What the f—" Tommy's complaint was cut off as Purpled slapped a hand across his mouth, pointing towards the doors with wide eyes.

When Tommy took a moment to examine the exit he understood Purpled's warning. There were two guards posted at each exit. None of them looked particularly busy but each was draped in a familiar ice blue. More royal soldiers.

"Fuck," Tommy mumbled.

Purpled glanced around the room nervously, "We could go upstairs, wait everyone out in the rafters."

Tommy shook his head, “If they don’t find us coming out they’ll have guards posted around the clock, we’ll be stuck here forever. I say we go now, they’re not just going to stop two random kids from leaving.”

“Tommy, they’ve all probably got your face fucking memorized by now! You don’t think they’re going to think it’s odd too kids are leaving the largest wielding event in a century, at least odd enough to take a good look at our faces?” Purpled hissed.

Tommy groaned, Purpled was right but, “It’s our best option. If we give them time to get organized, we’re fucked.”

Purpled took a long glance at Tommy before sighing. “Fine,” he nodded.

Just as they were about to step out of the shadows and make a dash for the doors, the young guard from earlier came barreling through the lobby. “Close the doors and lock them, no one leaves until the Royal Prince commands it!” his voice was high and shrill and nearly out of breath.

Tommy cursed and shared an annoyed glance with Purpled, *there goes that*. “Okay, new plan: get back to the crowds, blend in, try to sneak out with a family.”

“I thought you said not to let them get organized,” Purpled argued.

Tommy ran a hand down his face, “Yeah, well that’s clearly not an option anymore. C’mon,” he pulled Purpled back into one of the halls behind them before any of the guards started sweeping the lobby.

They were nearly back to the main area when a guard popped out from the doorway in front of them. Both parties froze for a moment before Tommy and Purpled were scrambling backward.

“Oi, stop!” the guard yelled after them.

Tommy turned around for a moment to yell a quick “Fuck you!” back at him. Purpled just rolled his eyes and tugged Tommy further along. They ducked into the nearest archway, hoping to end up somewhere with fewer guards and more people.

They came out back in the main arena a few sections away from where they’d begun. Dream was nowhere to be seen anymore but Techno was still up on the main court yelling at a handful of guards. The rest of the stadium was in shambles. Tommy couldn’t hear himself think over the shrieks of the crowd. Guards were wrestling through the people, swinging swords around as warnings.

Tommy cursed, looking for a quick escape. He knew the guards were right behind them, blocking the exits, and there were maybe four guards closing in on them from the sides. His eyes caught on a familiar white cape.

Punz was standing in their section motioning towards them to someone Tommy couldn’t see. When the older man turned back, they made eye contact. Punz was too far away to get to them, but he started pointing back toward the court. At first, Tommy couldn’t figure out what Punz was showing him but then the trapdoors by the court caught his eyes. They hadn’t been closed in the confusion and Techno’s door was almost directly in front of them.

Tommy found Punz’s eyes once more and nodded resolutely. He tugged on Purpled’s sleeve and motioned towards the open doors. His friend followed his hand, eyes widening when they landed on the trapdoors and nodded. They kept their heads down as they shouldered through the crowd, trying not to appear like fish swimming upstream. When they finally broke through the last row of fleeing guests, they both booked it towards the doors.

Up close the trapdoors were a bit intimidating, nearly twice as tall as him and the steps disappeared into darkness after a few feet and nothing could be seen beyond. He felt them both hesitating, so Tommy shoved Purpled through first (for his friend’s safety of course) and quickly followed.

The light of the arena quickly gave way to complete pitch blackness, even the shouting seemed muffled now. Logically Tommy knew it was runes, an enchantment of some sort, but it still sent an uncomfortable shiver down his spine. They needed to get out of here and fast.

Neither had any idea where they were walking or even where the exit was, but they edged their way forward still. Suddenly Purpled stopped causing Tommy to stumble slightly into his back.

“What the fuck,” Tommy hissed quietly.

“Wait,” Purpled whispered. “Stay along the wall, we’ll trace it until we find a doorway”

Tommy nodded, slowly making his way over to the nearest wall and placing his hand on it. He walked for a few more paces before his hand bumped into something hard and metal. He grinned, searching for a doorknob.

“Purpled I think I found...” Tommy trailed off as the metal he was feeling moved under his hand, almost as if it was taking a breath. “What the fuck?”

Suddenly, the room lit up and standing in front of him was Fundy, dressed in full battle armor. Tommy backed up a few paces. “Oh shit,” he mumbled.

“Oh shit, is right,” a familiar voice made him whip around. Wilbur stood behind him, holding a knife to Purpled’s throat.

He stumbled forward a few paces only for Wilbur to tsk, “I wouldn’t do that, Theseus, not if you want your little friend here alive.” His brother pushed the knife into his friend’s neck a little hard to make his point. Tommy felt his vision tinge red at the sight of a thin line of blood that trickled down Purpled’s neck.

“You’re insane,” Tommy whispered, eyes wide and blazing.

“And you, little prince, are in a lot of trouble.”

I hope you guys liked it, sorry for the wait! I had absolutely no time this summer to work on this but I'm glad to be back. We're entering the home stretch of the story and I'm so excited to finish up finally. Sorry it's a little short this time but I really wanted to just get this chapter out there, but please let me know your thoughts, I love reading y'all's comments! Follow me on [twitter](#) for updates and maybe I'll do some polls or something idk :) (i also updated some tags for the future and some things i missed before so take a look if you want)

a reunion of sorts

Chapter Summary

Tommy finds himself back within the palace walls and after a few conversations with his father, he is more than desperate to escape.

Chapter Notes

TW: idk controlling assholes? also mild blood and violence

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy flexed his hands within the tight restraints, mentally cursing Fundy for tying them tight enough to bite into his skin. He can feel the weight of the suppressor cuff heavy against his wrist. Wilbur had not been bluffing when he'd put a knife to Purpled's throat. His brother still had the smaller boy within his grasp. It was only as they walked through the streets that the knife was removed from his throat and instead pressed to his back. Tommy knew it was a threat every time he caught a glimpse of shining metal, his brother reminding him of how powerless he was.

The group had long since made it out of the city slums and were now approaching the more sparsely built inner ring. An itchy cloak had been thrown over his head as they'd marched through the city but now, he could feel it being tugged off. He glanced up just in time to catch sight of the carriage he was thrown into. It was a royal one for certain. There was enough gold trim to feed the whole city and two purebred horses waiting to pull it.

He groaned as his head bumped against the doorway as Fundy shoved him through and he could hear his brother hiss something towards the guard. He struggled against his binds to right himself, cursing his captors yet again for using such course rope. He was going to have awful rope burn for days. This was going to be a long journey.

Once they were loaded up, the coachmen took off. The ride was quiet as they passed through town, Wilbur silently eyeing him down. Tommy was much more focused on his brother's knife, still gleaming against Purpled's side. One wrong move and the carriage would bleed

red. Tommy grimaced, he needed to find a way to get Purpled away. Maybe he could rendezvous with the rest of the crew, and they could still escape without their heads ending up lining the castle gate.

“Let Purpled go, Wilbur. You got what you wanted, I’m here so just let him go,” his voice cracked. Maybe his brother would take pity on him.

Wilbur stared at him for a moment before glancing down at Purpled. He stared for what seemed like an eternity before lowering the knife and laughing.

“Is his name really, Purpled?”

“Oh, fuck you, your name is *Wil-bur!*” Tommy hissed, angry on his friend’s behalf.

Wilbur just rolled his eyes. “He’ll be let go when we arrive home, just behave and everything will be fine.” Wilbur grinned, “Wouldn’t want anything bad to your little pet.”

Tommy felt his face go flush with anger at the insult as he watched Purpled’s do the same.

“Fuck you! He’s not my pet, he is my brother!” Tommy instantly realized his mistake when Wilbur’s eyes went dark. “Wait Wilbur, please don’t do anything stupid—”

Wilbur’s eyes never leave him as he lowers a window in the front of the carriage. “Speed up,” he instructs the driver curtly and Tommy can feel the carriage shake as they hit the uneven cobblestones. Something terrible is about to happen, Tommy can feel it in his gut.

Tommy can only watch in horror as Wilbur yanks open the side of the carriage and without hesitation shoves Purpled out the door. He’s too far to do anything and he’s still being held by Fundy, all he can do is scream as Purpled’s body slumps out of sight. He can hear the sick thump of a body hitting the stones and a muffled cry and for a moment the world is still. Then they hit another uneven stone and Tommy is jostled back into his body.

“I never did like the color purple,” Wilbur mused, tucking his knife into his belt.

Tommy tried desperately to glance back out one of the carriage windows, but Fundy held him tightly. “Fuck you,” he spits.

Wilbur tutted,” That’s not very kind of you. I’m doing you a favor.”

Tommy grits his teeth. “I’m sure,” he bit out sarcastically.

“It’s true, imagine what Techno would have done if he got his hands on that pretender.”

“He’s not a pretender, he’s my b—”

“I would quit while you still have a tongue,” Fundy hissed in his ear.

Tommy slumped in his seat, cursing both men in his head, and hoped that, if nothing else, Purpled was alive.

The rest of the drive was silent. Well, that was technically untrue seeing as Wilbur refused to shut up the entire time, detailing everything that had happened since they’d begun their search for him but Tommy was pretending he didn’t exist. So, in Tommy’s mind, the drive was silent. He spent most of it plotting his escape. He could run the moment they reach the castle but he’s not likely to get very far. His family was unlikely to leave him alone for a while after everything. If he was going to escape, he’d need to do it sooner rather than later. It dawned on him that by shoving Purpled out of the carriage Wilbur had lost something very important, his leverage. There was nothing keeping Tommy in this carriage beyond a door and some restraints.

He slowly inched his hands towards the door, careful to keep them out of Fundy’s eyeline, until they reach the handle. He wasn’t in the best position to leap out from the door,

especially not with his hands still bound but he was desperate. When the handle was within reach, Tommy struck.

It took less than a second for Tommy to be air born and even less for a coil of water to snake around his waist and yank him back inside. *Fuck*, he'd forgotten how quick his brother's wielding could be.

In the blink of an eye, he was staring directly into Wilbur's eyes, they shone with anger as he reached for something else on his belt. "We tried doing this the easy way," Wilbur muttered.

"Fuck you," Tommy spit back.

He was too focused on trying to spit in Wilbur's eye and he missed the potion bottle breaking above his head. He felt a fog settle over him, his movements slowing and his mind sinking into a haze. Even his bones felt heavy. *Weakness*.

"You bastard," he wheezed with what little strength he had left.

Wilbur smiled, pulling him further into his side. "Shh, sunshine," he cooed. "It'll wear off soon enough."

As it turns out 'soon enough' meant as the guards were dragging him to the front of the throne room. It had been embarrassing enough for Wilbur to carry him out of the carriage and inside but having two guards hoist him around in front of his father, mortifying. Wilbur had spent nearly half an hour detailing the match and his escape attempts before Tommy was even brought forth. By the time his brother was finished, he could feel the fog fading as the guards positioned him in front of the king. He realized though he could use this to his advantage, so he continued to slump. He only needs them to underestimate him once.

"Shouldn't the potion have worn off by now," his father asks with a raised eyebrow, not looking at him but rather over his shoulder towards Wilbur.

Tommy clenched his teeth. He had been so used to being ignored but he wasn't the same boy he was, and his father's treatment irked him.

"Theoretically but you know I brew strong and besides who knows how the city treated him? He's practically skin and bones," Wilbur tutted.

Tommy bristled at the unsaid accusation, he and Purpled did well enough on their own, and all his older friends helped out when they could. Sure, he's lost a pound or two, but he never went hungry.

Phil hummed, seemingly satisfied with the answer. "What's the news on the accomplices?" he asked.

"Dream's crew escaped but we're still scouring the city, they won't evade us much longer," Techno's baritone voice almost made Tommy jump.

He hadn't noticed the man in the room before, too focused on not tripping over his own weakened feet. Tommy wondered who else was behind him, witnessing his humiliation. He imagines Tubbo was probably watching gleefully from the shadows somewhere.

"Good," Phil nodded before finally turning to look at Tommy.

He shuddered under his father's gaze. Looking into those cold, blue eyes, he was reminded of the years after his mother died when Phil had extinguished rebellion after rebellion to cement his place on the throne. King Philza had put heads on spikes and hung his enemies' bodies along the city bridges. The people had nicknamed him the Angel of Death. Tommy had never met the Angel before, the age of rebellion was over before he could walk. The Angel had always been myth more than anything, a story Wilbur would tell him to frighten him before bed. But at that moment, as Tommy met his father's gaze, he knew he was not staring at his father, he was staring at the Angel.

"I hope you've had fun," the Angel grinned, "because that will be the last time you leave this castle."

Tommy shuddered at his frigid tone. “Father,” he allowed his speech to slur a bit, playing on the effect of the weakness potion.

Phil’s gaze softened slightly. “What do you have to say for yourself?” he demanded. “Why did you feel such a need to run off and play pretend? We have given you everything! Do you understand how worried we were? I thought you kidnapped, imagine my betrayal when it was discovered you *ran away*! You could’ve been hurt, kidnapped, killed, and we might never have known!” His father was near raving by the end of his speech.

“I was tired,” Tommy answered honestly, still trying to remain docile and sluggish. “I was constantly ignored, left behind, and hurt. I was tired of pretending like I mattered to you, I just wanted to matter,” his voice broke.

His father looked taken aback, and Tommy had to stifle a laugh. His father was an idiot, there was clearly a reason he’d fought so hard to not come back. Right now, he needed sympathy and pity if he hoped to escape anytime soon.

“I’m sorry,” he sobbed. “I knew shouldn’t have but they treated me like family. They loved me!”

“We love you,” Wilbur cut in coldly. “We’re your family, not those traitors!”

Tommy turned to glare at his brother, he was a fool to think Tommy would ever believe him again. His brother met his glare with one of his own. After a moment, as Tommy turned to face his father once more, he met Techno’s eyes. There was a sadness there that he hadn’t expected. His older brother didn’t wear the same expression of anger or betrayal Wilbur and his father donned. No, Techno looked at Tommy as though he was mourning him as if Tommy was nothing more than a ghost waiting to be put to peace.

“Father,” Techno spoke up, still staring at him. “Perhaps we should allow Theseus to rest, he’s had a long day and he’s clearly still suffering from Wilbur’s overreaction.”

It was all Tommy could do, not to let his jaw drop in shock. Techno hardly ever spoke against their father so openly, especially not in Tommy's defense.

His father ignored Wilbur's spluttering defense as he regarded Tommy again. Tommy looked back at the man he once called father. He took a moment to truly regard the man who'd failed to raise him. He noticed how disheveled he looked, a few buttons out of place, and his hair unkempt. There were bags under his eyes that spoke of sleepless nights. For just a moment, Tommy felt sorrow. Though it was quickly swallowed by anger, where had this worry been when he was still living in the palace?

"Fine," the king sighed, waving his hands toward the guards. "Escort, Thomas back to his chambers. We'll resume in the morning."

The breath fell out of Tommy as his father dismissed him. Was that it? A little anger and a quick dismissal. It annoyed him and relieved him in equal parts. He'd gone missing for weeks, caused a city-wide manhunt, and nearly fled the continent and all he got was a barely stern talking to! Hanging his head, he figured if nothing less, it boded well for any future escape attempts.

Three guards immediately stepped near to grasp his arms, but he waved them off. Pretending to stagger to his feet. They immediately surrounded him, leading him toward the hall.

"Oh, and Tommy," his father called out, "one of these guards will stay with you at all times. We wouldn't want you going missing again."

Tommy groaned internally, well that's a bit inconvenient.

The walk back to his chambers was silent, none of the guards seemed keen to talk with him but that hardly bothered Tommy. It gave him a chance to think. His plan in the carriage failed because he didn't have enough time, now he had more time than anything else. He knew this castle like the back of his hand, he'd be able to figure something out.

They were nearly halfway back to his quarters when they were intercepted.

“I’ll take it from here,” Techno motioned for the guards to scatter.

“But, your highness, his grace asked us to—” one of the guards began to protest.

Techno swiftly cut him off, “I was there, I know what he asked. But I can assure you I am far more capable of watching my brother than any of you.”

The guard still seemed unconvinced. “Your Highness, it would not—”

“Now,” his brother snarled, sending all the guards reeling backward. They all quickly bowed and rushed off down the corridor. Most likely to report back to the king.

“You know they’re just going to tell Father, right?” Tommy asked, more amused than anything.

Techno just rolled his eyes. “Yes, I imagine they will. Father trusts me, which is more than I can say for you at the moment,” he motions toward the suppressor cuff.

Tommy just scoffed. “Not like he ever trusted me much to begin with, the man hardly speaks to me.”

“That’s not true,” Techno huffs. “Phil loves you just as much as the rest of us.”

“Back in the throne room, that was the most he’d spoken to me in the past year.”

Techno fell silent before sighing and rubbing a hand through his hair. “We’ll table this discussion for tomorrow. Let’s get you to your room.”

Tommy groans, there would be no winning this conversation. “What you’re not going to carry me? After all, I’m still dealing with the effects of Wilbur’s potion.”

“Please,” Techno snorts. “You’ve always been a terrible actor.”

Tommy stills, had Techno known he was faking it the entire time? If he knew, why had he then given Tommy an out?

“I can hear you thinking all the way down there. C’mon, runt, let’s go to your rooms before I actually have to carry you. If you’re quiet I’ll explain on the way.”

Tommy huffed but hurried after his brother nonetheless. As they walked, Techno kept his promise. He explained that it was clear everyone needed some time to clear their heads. Phil was still very upset that he’d gone missing, and it’d taken them so long to notice, Wilbur was angry Tommy had run away, and on top of it all, no one had slept in days. By the time they’d reached Tommy’s room, Tommy could feel his own anger dwindling.

“That was not a conversation to be had with so little cognition. Besides you’re angry enough at us as is, I can’t imagine coming fresh off your return you were pleased to see us. This gives you some time to settle.” Techno had finished stoking the fire and motioned for Tommy to come to join him.

“Wilbur pushed my friend out of a moving carriage,” Tommy grits his teeth as he and Techno both took a seat across from the fire.

Techno’s movement stuttered slightly. “Why?”

“He’s an asshole?”

“Theseus?” Techno growled warningly.

Tommy threw his hands up, “I called Purpled my brother, alright! Because he is, he’s more my brother than any of you assholes are and Wilbur didn’t take it very well. And now I don’t know if he’s even alive!”

“Sounds like your fault,” Techno huffed.

Tommy could feel the ground beneath him give way with his anger, “Fuck you! Wilbur is the one who pushed my best friend out of a *moving* carriage!”

“Stop ruining the floor,” Techno motioned toward the newly formed cracks under their feet. “Wilbur’s dramatic, we both know that you shouldn’t rile him up.”

“I was not riling him up!” Tommy spluttered. “Wil’s a psycho who’s going to inherit a throne!”

Techno was out of his seat before Tommy could blink, his hands gripping Tommy’s arms. “Wilbur is not crazy, never call him that. Wilbur will make a wonderful ruler. Yes, he has a lot to learn. Yes, he’s impulsive. And yes, sometimes he takes things too far but only because he’s got a big heart. He loves you, he’s been beside himself these past few weeks trying to bring you home. I don’t necessarily disagree with what he did but I understand your anger.”

Tommy couldn’t stand Techno’s intense stare and squirmed in his hold. “Stars, you’re all impossible. I just wanted a family that didn’t constantly ignore me or keep secrets from me!”

“What secrets?” *Of course, that was the part Techno clung to.*

“I met Quackity,” he says quietly.

He wasn’t sure how he imagined his brother would react to the name, but it certainly wasn’t the soft laughter that Techno let out. “Oh, and what did he have to say?”

“That you’re mortal enemies and he’d do anything to get revenge on you, even kidnapping a lost, little prince.”

His brother growled, well and truly growled. “I would slaughter him where he stood if he ever touched a hair on your head.”

Tommy was unsure whether he should be scared or reassured by the declaration.

Techno eyed for a moment, seeming to contemplate something before he sighed. “Quackity and I never got along,” he began, leaning back into his chair and staring into the fire.

“Always playful bickering on the training floors. Somewhere along the line that playfulness turned into disdain which became genuine anger. There was always something that grated me about him. Maybe he was too cocky, maybe *I* was too cocky. Who knows?” he shrugged.

He ran a hand through the flames, gathering a small ball between his fingers, it was a trick Tommy had seen him do back at the arena. He recognized it now, surrounded by candlelight and opulence, as one their mother used to do when she was thinking.

“It hardly matters now,” his brother continued. “I didn’t like the guy and so when I found out he was a fraud all that anger turned to hate. This imposter had come into my home, put my siblings in danger, and tried to beat me in a competition he shouldn’t have even been allowed to enter into in the first place. At the time, it had felt just. The voices kept telling me it was right, but I know better now. I know I was letting them rule me.”

Tommy sucked in a breath. Techno rarely talked about his curse with Tommy. He knew about it, of course, knew the common triggers, knew to avoid Techno when he was in a mood. But they never really talked about it.

“He hates you,” Tommy whispered. “Big Q blames you for ruining his life.”

Techno snorted, “Big Q?”

Tommy shot him an unimpressed glare, one which left Techno deflating in his chair a bit.

“I figured, the man was dragged from the castle swearing his vengeance.”

“And that doesn’t bother you?”

Techno shrugged, “I dunno, I don’t really think about it that often.”

Tommy scoffed, “Well, he sure does.”

Techno stood up, tossing his ball of fire back into the fireplace, “I’m going to let you get some sleep.”

Tommy watched him head for the door. “Wait,” he called out, hesitating until Techno turned back around. “Promise me, no matter what happens tomorrow, you’ll still love me.”

It takes Techno a moment to respond but when he does his voice is thick with emotion. “I’ll always love you, Thes.” And with that, he shut the door behind him.

Not even a moment later a guard steps into his room and sets up post near the window, presumably to watch him sleep. It’s creepy and Tommy wants to fight it but he’s more exhausted than anything. His eyes ache from crying and his feet hurt. He’s drained in one too many ways. Techno was right about one thing, he needed to sleep.

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He wakes up not remembering falling asleep but there’s a bundle of clothes on his desk, so he assumes Michael has already stopped by. The guard near his window is different than the one from last night which means they’re on a rotation. Tommy wants to complain, the only thing worse than one guard watching him sleep was two.

Stretching, Tommy pulls himself out of bed and into the bathroom, grabbing his clothes on the way. He washes his face before changing, hoping to scrub away any lingering exhaustion. He'd slept well, with no nightmares but no dreams either. The clothes were royal as ever, he noted. Tommy had almost forgotten how smooth silk tunics were or how warm heavy cotton pants could be. The cloak was blue, of course, and lined with grey fur. *It was definitely warm, and expensive.* It was something Tommy never would've thought about a few weeks ago but he wasn't the same boy as he was then.

The pounding on the door, likely by his guards, urged him to throw the thing on and finish getting ready. When he was done, the guards escorted him to the dining room for breakfast. He tried to drag his feet but that was hard to do with four guards prodding at him to speed up. When he finally entered the dining room everyone looked up.

Tommy took in all the familiar faces that sat before him. It reminded him of that fateful dinner all those weeks ago. The feelings of indignation and desperation were still there, crawling their way between the anger and misery. Stars he hated this place. Everyone was silent, staring at him as he took his seat.

Everything was the same and yet nothing was the same at all. Nothing here mattered. Suddenly the table wasn't as big as it used to be, and he noticed a scratch on the arm of his chair. Even the colors seemed duller than before. Yet somehow all the people still looked the same. It dawned on him, he was different now, but they weren't.

He began piling food onto his plate, flagging down one of the cupbearers to pour him some juice, and ignoring the looks from his family. It seemed to kick them into action because all at once everyone began to move and speak.

Tubbo was telling him how happy he was to see him again, *doubtful*. Wilbur was trying to convince him to apologize, *fuck that*. And Techno was asking him how he slept, *well enough*. There was too much noise for him to actually answer anyone and no one really quieted down when he asked. It was Phil who got them to fall silent.

"Boys," he cleared his throat. "I'm sure we all have lots to say and ask but we will have plenty of time for that. Right now, eat."

Always the obedient, Techno turned back to his food and dug in. Wilbur was more hesitant but eventually too began eating once more. Tubbo took the longest, staring down the boy who used to be his whole world. Tommy met his gaze, jutting out his chin. After a moment Tubbo picked up his knife once more and stabbed at his eggs. Tommy nodded to his father, feeling victorious, before following suit. The eggs were good and the bacon was the right amount of crispy, yet it all seemed to taste like ash in his mouth. He ate bite after bite, feeling his stomach fill with remnants of a life he'd burned long ago.

When breakfast was over, they were all herded into the throne room. Tommy hated the throne room, with its high ceilings and large windows. On a raised dais stood the Snow Throne upon which each emperor had sat since King Adam first reigned. The thing was ugly as fuck, in Tommy's opinion. The chair was completely metal, smooth, and cold, except for the top part which was littered with cutouts that created the illusion of snowflakes. Behind it stood the stained-glass window depicting King Adam crowning his youngest son but depending on where you stood it could appear as if he was crowning whoever sat in the chair. Tommy once used to imagine himself sitting on the throne, crown heavy on his head, now he wants nothing more than to flee the grand hall and ornate rugs. The room had a way of making everything seem small and he hated feeling small.

Phil had taken his seat on the throne and Tommy bit back a sneer at the sight of the old thing. Wilbur had the smaller throne to the right of it and Techno had claimed the chair on its other side. Tubbo sat, curled up on the stairs beneath Techno. Normally, Tommy would have joined Tubbo or mirrored him beneath Wilbur, but this wasn't normal. So he stood in front of the strangers he once called family and waited.

Phil was the one to break the silence. "What do you have to say for yourself?"

"Is this a trial?" Tommy scoffed.

Phil hummed, "Would you like it to be? You could be tried for treason. Princes cannot run from their duties."

"Fine, I'll abdicate and we can be done with this whole charade."

Wilbur stood up hissing, “How dare you threaten us after all the trouble you’ve caused!”

“That’s all I ever seem to bring to this family so why don’t you stop pretending to care so I can leave!” Tommy cried.

“You are not allowed to leave Theseus, you are far too precious for that. We treasure you far too much,” Techno broke in.

Tommy laughed at his brother’s words, broken and hysterical. “You don’t treasure me, you left me to waste! I sat alone for days, sometimes weeks with only my tutors and the occasional servant! It took you weeks to realize I was even gone! How precious could I really be to you?”

“Tommy, you are the most important person in my life,” Tubbo whispered, tears streaming down his cheeks. “I owe you everything and I’m sorry if I made you feel otherwise.”

“Oh shut the fuck up you two-timing, gold-digging—”

“Enough,” Phil’s voice booms. “I understand we have failed to show you how important you are to us, and we will be fixing that in the future but for now you will remain here, within the palace, where you can be watched.”

“You can’t even apologize,” Tommy stares hard at the floor in front of him, willing away tears. It’s too early in the morning for this.

“What?” Phil asks, clearly not expecting his words.

“You know what you did was wrong, but you can’t apologize for doing it,” Tommy laughs again. “Probably because you aren’t actually sorry. Nothing’s going to change now that I’m back here! Nothing ever changes here! It’s all frozen! I can’t stay here, I’ll die. If you make me stay you’ll kill me!”

As he finishes, gulping for air, he hears it. The clanking of metal rang through the throne room and Tommy turns to watch as another group of guards march in. Trailing behind them, hands encased in thick cuffs, were George, Sapnap, and Punz. Tommy feels ice-cold dread wash down him.

Fuck, fuck, fuck! He doesn't see Purpled with them which is easier really good or terrible. He also doesn't see Dream or the rest of the crew which was a relief. He tries to catch one of their eyes through the mass of guards but can't quite manage it.

"What are you doing?" Tommy asks, worry twisting inside him.

Phil glances between him and his friends and suddenly he's the Angel once more. "Demanding justice," is his father's reply. "Someone escort Thomas to his room."

He feels hands grabbing him but he's too focused on bolting forwards. He ducks under the guards and grabs onto the one closest to him. He can tell by the smell of iron and gunpowder it's Punz.

The mercenary holds him tight for a moment and whispers in his ear, "He's alright." Tommy sobs into his arms as hands tear them apart.

"No," he cries and tries to reach for them again, but the grips are tighter now, pulling him out of the room. "Please, no!" he begs for mercy, their mercy. He knows the Angel will not listen.

They shove him into his room, and he sobs into his pillows until exhaustion rocks him to sleep. He can only hope he does not dream of whatever his father has in store for his friends.

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A sharp knock on his door wakes him. Figuring it was most likely Michael with his lunch, he shouts for them to come in. However, instead of Michael, he was surprised to be greeted by the sight of his father's General and military advisor.

“Hello Puffy,” he nodded to her. He liked Puffy, she wasn’t as rigid as most of the military officials Phil worked with. “How are you?”

“I’m well. Thank you, Prince Thomas,” she smiled softly at him.

“Please, call me Tommy,” he sighed, it was a conversation they had every time they met.

“Prince Tommy,” she acquiesced. He nodded his approval, it was better than he usually got.
“How are you?”

“Well, I’m in this star-stricken room while my friends are being tried for treason so not great,” he grumbled.

“Hmm, how about we take a walk then?” She offered.

His eyes widened, “Seriously?”

“Sure, this room is pretty stuffy anyway,” she agreed, her white curls bouncing as she nodded.

Tommy quickly scabbled out of his room after her. Together they began to walk through the palace, winding through halls and corridors. As they walked servants bowed and greeted them and Puffy would smile back. Tommy had always admired the Captain, she commanded respect wherever she went but was still so kind. Tommy had always secretly preferred her quiet respect to Techno’s brute strength.

“Did you know these walls were built two hundred years ago?” She asked Tommy as they walked through a particularly long corridor.

"Yeah, the palace was built during King Adam's reign after he conquered the artic in the Frozen Wars," he recited the words that had been long drilled into his mind.

This part of the palace they'd wandered into was old and most of the walls were still the original quartz and limestone. When he really thought about it, it used to amaze Tommy that he walked the same halls his ancestors had for centuries. Now it felt stifling like the ghosts of his family were watching and judging.

"That's right, do you know why the entire royal family wears black during the Solstice festival?" Puffy asked as she steered them closer to the inner courtyards.

Tommy was confused by the sudden change in topics, "Uh, no? I hadn't ever really thought about it. Maybe to look like the night sky or something?"

Puffy paused to open the large doors at the end of the hall that gave way to the gardens. Tommy felt himself squinting as the sunlight bounced off the snow and blinded him. They continued to walk as she led him down the frost-bitten path. They were straying towards a part of the palace Tommy hadn't visited in a long time, not since his mother passed.

"No, not quite, it's a bit sadder than that. Have you ever learned about the Solstice Battle?" She led him through the snow and plants, winding a trail around the central courtyard.

"Solstice Battle?" Tommy asked, unfamiliar with the fight.

They paused in front of the fountain that took up most of the courtyard. It was running, it only ever spouted water for a few months in the summer when the water wouldn't freeze. Puffy stared towards the figure on top of the fountain. When Tommy turned his gaze to the same place, he realized the figure standing atop the fountain was King Adam, a sword in one hand and offering the other to an imaginary figure below him. His finger traced the inscription written on the edge of the pool, "Tragedy is often found beside love and sacrifice."

He's always wondered about the meaning of this fountain. Growing up he'd play in this courtyard for hours on end as his mother told him stories about her great-great-great

grandfather. He'd asked about the fountain, but she'd always promised to tell him when he was older. Still, it hadn't made sense to him. King Adam was lauded for his military brilliance and feared for her countenance, he was not known for his kindness or particular care for his subjects.

"The Solstice Battle was the last great battle King Adam fought before the Surran surrendered," she began. "It's not talked about often because of how poorly it ended. The fighting had been going on for three years at that point and both sides were exhausted. Men were dwindling, food was scarce, and people were desperate."

She led him over to one of the benches nearby and they sat. "During the Winter Solstice, King Adam found himself in a precarious place. His people were dying but there was no end in sight. With his troops dwindling, he knew he couldn't win another battle. So, he and his advisor devised a plan. See the soldiers were begging for a reprieve so they could celebrate the solstice but he knew the Surran did not share the holiday so any break would allow them to attack. An opportunity they could not pass up." Her frown tightens as she gazed out at the hand reaching downwards.

"His army holed up in this ravine to celebrate. The soldier thought they would be safe, it was easy to guard, and the high walls would help stifle the sounds of celebration. But Adam knew otherwise, the winds would carry their noises across the tundra. The Surran heard them from miles off and came flooding into the ravine. King Adam and his advisors had already escaped along with a handful of archers. As they stood above the carnage, staring at the icy mountains, covered in snow, that lined each side, he called for the second part of their plan."

She grimaced, staring straight ahead at the statue. She didn't continue for a moment and just as Tommy was going to ask about the advisor she continued.

"The advisor had told him that there was still time, they could have the troops retreat out of the valley then the archers could target the mountains' snow caps and force an avalanche. However, King Adam had been impatient for the end of the war and afraid that if he sounded the retreat, he would alert the enemy that something was about to happen."

Tommy reared backward, already fearing what would come next.

"He gave the archers an order to fire on the mountains and the advisor's plan worked. Most of the Surran troops were killed in the initial fall and the rest died of hypothermia or shock," She finished.

"But he killed his own army!" Tommy cried, outraged. *How had he never heard this story before?*

"Yes, he did. What he hadn't realized was his two oldest sons had decided to join the celebrations. They'd been killed in the avalanche and King Adam wrote in one of his journals many years later that the Solstice Battle was his greatest military and personal mistake. If he had waited and allowed his men to retreat, he still probably would have killed a large portion of the Surran army and still won, but he didn't. He was impatient and afraid, and it cost him dearly in the long run," Puffy explained.

"Why would he do it though? He should have waited," Tommy insisted.

"He should have," Puffy agreed. "But kings are not gods, they do not live amongst the stars, Prince Tommy. They are human, fully fallible, and likely to make mistakes, especially when afraid. However, unlike ordinary people the mistakes they make carry great consequences. Most kings come with great flaws that they will fight against their whole lives." Her voice was grave, a tone that did not suit her.

"When he finished building the palace, King Adam's youngest son insisted a fountain be constructed in this memory. He said he wanted to make sure no future king forgot the tragedy. That no king could forget they are above folly. That arrogance had cost him his brothers and his father two sons." She turned her back on the fountain and began to walk towards the doors on the opposite end of the courtyard.

"How have I never heard this story before?" Tommy had sat through years of history lessons but he could not recall even a mention of this Solstice Battle.

Puffy stood slowly. "Your father decided it was not a story meant for children, he forbade the tutors from speaking it."

“Why are you telling me it now?” Tommy questioned. The captain stopped walking and turned to him.

“Because sometimes it’s difficult to understand that kings are just people with flaws and they can be afraid and make mistakes that hurt many even if they are trying to achieve something great,” she told him, staring directly into his eyes. “Sometimes the greatest kings have the worst flaws.”

He didn’t quite understand her point but he nodded anyway. She held his gaze for a few more seconds, searching for something which she must have found because she turned back around and kept walking. He wanted to chase after her, ask her a thousand more questions but a different guard stepped into the courtyard.

Tommy groaned, “I know, I know back to my room.”

The guard, however, shook his head. “I was thinking we try something else,” a familiar voice came from beneath the helmet.

Chapter End Notes

so sorry for being MIA but i've had a busy few months anyways... hope you enjoyed!
I'm trying to round out everything but it's been a hot sec so there may just be some loose ends which i apologize for. Leave a comment and kudos bc i live off validation :) also follow me on [twitter](#) for updates

an end and a beginning

Chapter Summary

Can Tommy make his way back to his friends? Will he escape the castle and his overbearing family? Tommy scrambles to protect what little he has left of his heart around his old family while fighting for his new one and maybe finding something else entirely along the way.

Chapter Notes

CW:

-manipulation

that's it really, kinda a sweet chapter to wrap up this shit show

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“I was thinking we try something else.”

Tommy leaped to his feet, throwing himself at Dream. The older boy flicked up the visor on his helmet, revealing a pair of electric green eyes shining with mischief.

“You came,” Tommy breathed.

Dream hugged him tighter. “Of course, we came!”

“We?”

“All of us: me, Foolish, Ponk, even Niki is here,” Dream said as he began pushing them to the door.

Tommy's eyes widened. "Hold on, that's a lot of people! What if one of you gets caught?"

Dream shrugged, pushing the door open quietly. "We never get caught, trust me. We've broken into places way more secure before and gotten out unnoticed."

As he slipped through the corridors, dread began to settle in his stomach. Something wrong, really wrong. He just couldn't quite put his finger on what.

"Dream," he tugged at the older's arm. "Something's not right."

The older boy just rolled his eyes. "It's fine, Toms. Now we need to hurry, we'll meet up with everyone at the ship."

They rounded the corner only to come face to face with the Crowned Prince, holding a struggling Foolish against his knife.

"Yeah, I don't think so," Wilbur laughed.

Dream was quick to push Tommy behind him as if Tommy was the one in danger here. "Wilbur," Dream started, his voice low. "Let him go."

"Wilbur, let him go," the prince lowered his voice an octave, mocking Dream. "No, I don't think I will. After all, why should I? He's an intruder."

"Because I'll hate you forever if something happens to them," Tommy screamed from behind Dream.

Wilbur cocked his head at his little brother. "Oh, will you now? Forever is an awfully long time. I reckon you'll forgive me eventually."

Tommy shook his head vehemently. “With the stars as my witness, I will never love you again if you hurt either of them!” he cried.

Wilbur sighed, lowering his knife a bit. Foolish took advantage of the new freedom and yelled out, “Run, it’s a trap!”

Wilbur clamped a hand over the man’s mouth. “Sh, sh, don’t make me be mean!” he cooed as he tapped the dagger against the side of Foolish’s face. “As I was saying, I think we should take this little party elsewhere. Dad’s dying to meet the rest of your little friends.”

Tommy could feel Dream tense up, clearly ready to run but Tommy couldn’t. This was his family at stake, he couldn’t leave them here. No one was dying for him today, not if he had any say in it.

With a conviction he didn’t quite feel yet, Tommy squared his shoulders and stepped out from behind Dream.

Dream tried to pull him back, but the young prince just shrugged the hand away. “I’ll go, but you have to let go of Foolish.”

“Tommy, no,” Dream whispered at the same time Wilbur scoffed. “Why should I?”

Electing to ignore his friend, Tommy stared at Wilbur for the first in a long time. He took a moment to see past the mania that swirled in his brother’s eyes. Wilbur looked tired. His shoulders were lined with years far more than he’d lived. There were bruises under his eyes and his hair, once curly and healthy, laid dull and frizzy. His fingers were wrapped in bandages, no doubt from playing his guitar for hours on end without reprieve.

A part of Tommy was vindicated by his brother’s state, the other was saddened. “Wil,” he whispered, watching as his brother faltered. “Please, I’m sorry. All this has gotten so out of hand. I just want it to be done with, let’s talk to Ph—Dad and sort it all out.”

Tommy could see the tears well up in his brother's eyes before he could viciously wipe them away. "Promise?" and a part of Tommy's heart ached at the raw pain in his brother's voice.

It was like they were children again, still drowning in grief and clinging to each other in an empty throne room. Something deep in him ached. They would never be that young again, forever cursed to keep growing.

He nodded creeping closer to his brother. "On the stars," he promised taking the knife out of Wilbur's hand.

Wilbur nodded decidedly, shoving Foolish towards Dream. Both cried out when Wilbur tugged Tommy into his grasp instead, but Tommy allowed himself to melt into the hug. Suddenly he was 12 years old again, wishing desperately for his brothers to love him again.

It only lasted a moment before Tommy turned back to Dream and Foolish. "Go," he nodded towards the exit. "I'll find you when it's time," he shot them a watery smile.

Foolish shook his head. "No, no," he refused. "Please, come with us."

"We're not leaving without you," Dream agreed.

"I love you," Tommy told them, ignoring the sudden tightening of Wilbur's grasp. "But it's time for you to go. I'll see you soon, okay?"

Wilbur snorted. "I would leave now before I change my mind. Dad'll have your head for trying to take our little Prince again."

Dream looked like he wanted to argue further but Foolish began pulling him towards the exit. He stared at Tommy as they left, searching his face for something. He doesn't find it though, Tommy can read the disappointment that bleeds across his expression before he slips out of sight.

Wilbur and Tommy stand together, intertwined, for another moment. The sun and the moon, laughter and song, a prince and his pied piper. “Come on,” Wilbur smiled down at him. “Father’s waiting.”

The walk to the throne room is long, with every step Tommy finds something new to worry about. Had Dream and Foolish escaped safely, what had happened to George, Punz, and Sapnap, where was Purpled? So many worries he was afraid he’d never get answered. The carpet muffled their footsteps as they approached the large doors leading into the throne rooms. Two guards watch them approach, faces stoic. They only open the doors when Wilbur nods to them.

As he took in his father, sitting on his throne head held high, he was reminded of yesterday and this morning. His father was uncompromising, and stubborn when he settled on his way. He was like a mountain and Tommy was going to try and do the impossible, move him. Tommy took a deep breath, he had one chance to save his friends.

He chanced a glance towards the corner of the room where his friends stood, hands and feet chained together but otherwise unharmed. He let out a breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding, he still had time.

Tommy squared his shoulders as he stood in front of his father but kept his head bowed.

“Father,” the word tasted like ash in his mouth, but the king let out an approving hum. “I’m willing to make a deal.”

Phil laughed, long and sharp. When he’d finally settled down, he wiped his eyes and looked down at Tommy. “Please, enlighten me, what possible negotiating power do you have?”

Tommy gritted his teeth, keeping his eyes on the ground. “Love,” he whispered.

The throne room fell silent for a moment before the king spoke again. “What are you talking about?”

“You want me to love you,” Tommy shrugged. “Right now, I don’t love any of you,” he ignored the wounded sound that came from Wilbur next to him and plowed on. “I’m willing to work with you, live with you again, love you again but only if you help me. I can’t do it alone, I need you to help.”

Tommy finally looked up at his father. His eyes were dark and his mouth set in a firm line but he wasn’t saying no which was a good sign. It struck Tommy in that moment how similar they looked. Phil was everything he could be, but it also dawned on Tommy, he was everything Phil had been. They were two sides of the same coin, the past and the future all wrapped into the space between them.

Phil finally spoke, his words slow and deliberate. “What do you want us to do?”

Tommy stifled his grin, he’d done the easy part but the hard part was yet to come. All it took was three short words to cause the throne room to dissolve into complete and utter chaos.

“Let me go.”

All his brothers immediately began speaking, talking over each other.

“No fucking way, we just got you back!”

“We cannot let you go again!”

“How could you ask—”

“I cannot believe—”

While Punz whistled loud and sharp as George and Sapnap stood cheering. Tommy glanced back at them, laughing at their support. His laughter quickly died as he watched the guards yank on their shackles, raising their swords to threaten his friends into silence. The only thing stopping Tommy from marching across the room to them was Wilbur's vice-like grip on his arm.

Phil held up his hand, effectively silencing the room. "I'm inclined to agree with your brothers. We just got you back Theseus, I cannot let you go so soon."

Tommy shook his head. "It won't be forever. Wilbur toured the continent when he was my age, Techno had the same opportunity, but he turned it down. I'm sure you'll extend the offer to Tubbo soon. I want my own adventure."

"That's different," Phil shook his head. "They did not run away. Wilbur asked me and I allowed. You forced my hand. Have you not had enough adventure?"

Tommy's hand curled into a fist, his nails digging into the meat of his palm. "Please, I'm asking now. I'm sorry for running away but I was tired, and no one ever listened to me anyway. I didn't think you'd even care!"

"Of course we cared, we're your family!"

Tommy took a deep breath, he could feel the situation slipping between his fingers. "I know that now, but I didn't then." *Time to pull out the big guns.* "I thought you didn't love me anymore," he felt the tears well up and he let out a bit of the hurt and betrayal he'd felt all those months ago.

Phil's stern face stuttered, his mouth falling open slightly before he could school it back into indifference. Techno also looked as if he'd just been electrocuted.

"Oh, Toms," Wilbur whispered, his voice thick. "We've always loved you, never doubt that."

Tommy pulled away from his brother. “But I did doubt it because that’s what it felt like! No one would talk to me unless it was to yell at me, no one ever had time for me anymore, I barely saw any of you! How was I supposed to know you loved me when you never bothered to show it?”

Phil was quiet for a moment, taking in what Tommy had just shouted at them, before nodding. “I see how that would be confusing for you—”

“Not confusing,” Tommy interrupted him. “Devastating, heartbreaking, soul destroying maybe.”

Phil seemed to take into account his words as he continued. “But, I cannot let you travel the world alone. Perhaps in a few years, I’ll take you on a tour of the continent.”

Tommy turned green at the thought. “I wouldn’t be traveling alone,” Tommy refuted him. “I would be traveling with my family.”

Phil raised an eyebrow at him. “I assume you mean those criminals who you’ve been hanging out with. I don’t think it’s appropriate for a prince to be seen with convicted traitors.”

Tommy snorted, “I hardly think the son of your top general and his decorated crew are so far beneath me.”

“Oh, and what about the assassin and his protégé? Or the con artist and those unscrupulous wielders you like to run around with?”

Tommy sucked in a breath, this was a losing argument. “Please, father,” he begged. “They took me in when I was at my most vulnerable. They stopped me from starving on the streets, they taught me so much about the real world. Dad, they *loved* me!”

Phil held up his hand, “That is enough, I’ve made my decision.”

“No! They were willing to die for me, they knew the risks of sheltering me even before they knew I was a prince and they never thought twice about it! They protected me for months out in the city, what am I if I can’t protect them now?”

He was panting at this point, trying to get enough air in his lungs before making his final point.

“Let me travel, with them, for a few years and then let me come home. Prove it to me that you do love me. Prove to me that you love me enough to trust that I’ll come back to you! I will, I swear on the stars, I’ll always come back.”

Phil’s expression turned disturbingly blank and for a moment Tommy could swear time had frozen. Everyone, everything, had gone still.

“Clear the throne room,” his father commanded. “Take the prisoners to the dungeons and Prince Theseus to his rooms.”

Tommy balked at his father. That was it? “What? No, Phil, please!” he tried to plead with the man, but he was already being pulled away.

Tommy sat in his room, balancing a ball of hardened clay on his fingertip. He’d been sitting there for hours, alone with nothing but his thoughts. *He should have just gone with Dream and Foolish.* Now he was stuck in this stupid room while his family was planning the execution of his closest friends. He wanted to scream.

He couldn’t sit in this room any longer. He had to get out, now. He heaved himself up from the ground and marched over towards the door, picking up a bit of loose dirt with him on the way. It wasn’t hard to form the dirt into long, thin lock picks but they weren’t very strong.

Tommy groaned as the pick broke for the third time. He tried wetting them down with water from the washing basin beside his bed but that had only been marginally more successful, the

mud only slightly more moldable. He was running out of ideas as he began fiddling with the picks once more.

After a few minutes of fiddling, the door actually clicked and Tommy nearly jumped for joy. As he began pulling at the handle, the door swung open. Tommy landed awkwardly off to the side trying to not get hit by the door as Phil and Wilbur walked in. They both looked unhappy, but Wilbur shot him a strained smile when he saw him.

“Why are you on the floor, mate?” the king lifted an eyebrow, staring at Tommy sprawled along the floor.

Tommy was quick to jump up, laughing nervously. “Oh, you know, just... examining the tile work!”

“Examining the what?” Wilbur looked at him incredulously.

“The tilework, it’s very fine and good,” Tommy chattered on. “Anyway, what did you want?”

Phil sighed. “Let’s have a seat,” he motioned towards the settee and chairs off to the side of his room.

The three of them sat there for a moment in silence. Tommy coughed slightly trying not to laugh at the awkwardness. He needed to be angry at them.

“I’ve talked with your brothers, and we’ve come to a conclusion,” Phil started, and Tommy felt himself stiffen. “We will *allow* you to travel with these so-called friends of yours—”

It was all Tommy could do to not leap out of his seat and start dancing. “Thank you, thank you, thank you!” he chanted.

“But,” his father continued, dampening Tommy’s spirits. *There was always a but.* “You are only given leave for a year, maybe two given extenuating circumstances, and you must keep in communication with us the entire time. At the end of your travels, you must return home and take up your royal duties?”

“Royal duties?” Tommy asked, confused. He’d never had duties before, not really.

Wilbur nodded. “We thought it was about time you had a place in this palace, so we’ve named you our citizen’s liaison. You’ll effectively be one of my advisors in charge of making sure the people are happy,” he explained.

Tommy’s eyes stung slightly, “Okay, I like the sound of that.”

The man in front of him smiled and for the first time in years, Tommy saw his dad. He couldn’t stop himself from throwing his arms around his dad. “Thank you,” he whispered in his eye.

“Anything for you, sunshine,” Wilbur smiled, “Anything.”

“Wait does this mean my friends are pardoned?”

His father sighed but nodded. “As long as they remain on their best behavior for the next 10 years they get to live.”

Tommy found himself hugging his dad even tighter.

“Why are you letting me leave?” Tommy asked. “Not that I’m not grateful, but I was certain you’d trap me here forever.”

Wilbur and his father exchanged a glance Tommy couldn’t quite decipher before Phil sighed.

“I can see now, how we treated you was not right. You are my son, the same as Wilbur or Techno or Tubbo. It took far too much for me to realize exactly how precious you are to me,” his father smiled thinly at him. “If allowing you this trip will ensure you remain by our side forever, I will do that. Missing you for a few years is far better than losing you forever.”

“Techno and Tubbo also made some excellent points about resentment and abandonment issues. It’s easier to have a happy Tommy than a gremlin Tommy,” Wilbur smirked.

“Oh, fuck you!”

It took another three or so hours to actually leave the palace. His father needed to double and triple-check that he had enough rations and clothes and file all the necessary documentation for their ship. He’d tried at first to give them part of the royal fleet but Tommy had talked him down by saying he didn’t want an obvious target on them. His brothers had each said their own goodbye.

Wilbur and Techno gave him long hugs, Wilbur cried like the baby he was and Techno ruffled his hair. Both of them left Tommy feeling unsteady. He’d never expected he would miss his older brothers but, in that moment, he knew he would. It was his last goodbye that left him feeling the most confused. Tubbo hadn’t said much just hugged him tight and pressed a pouch of self-detonating bombs into his hand. Tommy had laughed at the gesture but pulled him closer.

“Stay safe, bee boy,” Tommy whispered into his hair.

“I always thought it’d be me and you out there, together,” Tubbo had murmured.

Tommy tightened his grip, “Maybe it could’ve been.”

They'd left it at that. It wasn't quite an apology, but it was something.

He'd met Punz, Sapnap, and George by the castle gate as they were getting their shackles removed. Each one was also given a pack of clothes and rations similar to Tommy's and a rather pointed lecture on safety and good citizenship by his dad. They each took it in stride, nodding and promising to be upstanding members of the Empire. Tommy scoffed but it only earned him three cuffs to the ear.

The goodbyes were tearful on his family's end and though he didn't shed a tear, Tommy did get a bit emotional. He knew there was a lot to fix between them, a lot that could never be fixed too, but he was getting his family back. Sure, he saw them a little differently now but wasn't that just a part of growing up? He'd come back in a year and things would be better.

Or at least that's what he hoped as the four of them raced down to the docks to find the rest of their friends.

Tommy did shed a tear, or many, at seeing Purpled once more. His best friend was a bit bruised and had a few scrapes on the side of his face but looked otherwise unharmed. The moment Purpled caught sight of him running down the dock he'd hopped off the boat and taken off towards him. They'd met somewhere in the middle in a pile of limbs and clothes. Tommy reveled in feeling his best friend alive and warm around him. After a moment they stopped wrestling and stood up for a breath, laughing all the way. Tommy took his time as he pulled Purpled close examining him for any other injuries.

"I thought you were dead," Tommy whispered, running a hand over the dark purple bruise over his friend's eye. *It's almost the same shade as his eyes*, Tommy thought morbidly.

Purpled tightened his arms around him. "It takes a lot more than getting shoved out of a carriage to kill me."

"That would be a pretty dumb way to die," Tommy laughed wetly. "Your epithet would be ridiculous."

"Here lies Purpled, flattened by a carriage wheel."

Dream was next as he pulled him into a tight hug, apologizing profusely for leaving him. Tommy waved off his apologies, he did exactly what Tommy had asked of him. He'd trusted Tommy and that was all the blonde could ask for.

The rest of the reunion was filled with excitement and relief. Once it was all said and done, they began loading up the ship and making final preparations. As the afternoon sun crept into dusk, they were almost ready to depart. Everyone began finding their places around the deck.

It was Sapnap who hung back on the dock, glancing between the boat and the city behind them. "I'm not going."

"What?" Dream had put down the box he'd been moving and stood staring at his friend.

"Something's wrong with Karl. We've all seen it. I can't just leave him like that," the flame wielder sighed. "I'm staying back with Q, we've got some shit to sort out anyway."

Tommy looked away as the two men embraced. "I'll miss you, man," he heard Dream whisper.

"Same," he sounded choked up. "It's for the best."

"I know."

Sapnap coughed, looking around at the rest of the crew. "Try not to have too much fun without me," he demanded.

"Don't worry about us," Tommy grinned. "Go save your relationship!"

Sapnap laughed wetly but nodded. "Well, I guess this is goodbye."

Dream shook his head, “Hardly goodbye, we’ll see each other soon enough.”

“Better to get it out of the way then, just means we’re that much closer to hello again.”

“When did you turn in a fucking philosopher, big S?” Tommy cackled.

The older boy rolled his eyes. “This is what I get for trying to be sentimental. Bye, gremlin child.”

Tommy squawked profanities at his retreating figure, ignoring Dream’s high-pitched laughter.

There was an odd sense of somberness to the crew as they finished preparing for anchors up. It was as if Sapnap had taken all the levity the group had with him as he’d left. Tommy found himself playing with a small ball of clay in his hands, shaping it into various animals. Purpled had sidled up next to him at some point but neither had said a thing.

“I’ve never left the Arctic before,” Tommy said quietly. “Not on my own at least. The Empire has always been my home, now it feels like I’m running from it. Again.”

“You’re not alone,” Purpled wrapped an arm around his shoulders. “We’re here and we’ll always be here. And it’s okay to run from the things that hurt you even if they were once kind. A thing can be good and bad at the same time.”

Tommy found himself glancing back towards the city, in the distance he could make out the faint outline of the palace spires.

“What if I never come back?” he whispered, voicing a thought that had been nagging him since leaving the castle.

Sure, he'd made a promise but if something happened to him out there, this would be his last time seeing his home.

"Then you don't come back, you find something better out there. That's okay too," Purpled shrugged. "Some homes are meant to be left, to be grown out of."

It was at this point something dawned on Tommy. This had been Theseus's home. A palace and its people, this was the place that raised a prince. But Tommy hadn't been Theseus in a while, but he had been once. He'd worn a crown and cape with pride, ate at feasts, and danced at balls. He'd met foreign dignitaries and laughed with princesses. But he's also run with pirates and mercenaries, joked with thieves, and loved every last moment of it all. He had been a prince and a runaway, he's been lost and loved in both lives. He needed to find out who he was now before he could come back here.

"I think whatever's out there will be grand," Tommy grinned, eyes meeting Purpled's bright ones. They both cackled.

"Intruder!" Foolish yelled from the crow's nest where he'd been situating himself.

Both boys whip their heads around looking for the figure Foolish had called out. Running down the dock at full speed was a cloaked figure, no doubt heading towards them. They still weren't ready to leave yet, Tommy knew this and so did Dream. As the figure got closer and closer at an alarming speed, the crew began to ready themselves. Tommy pulled his clay close, sharpening it into deadly spikes, and behind him he heard the distinct *shink* of metal swords being unsheathed.

Without warning the cloaked figure jumped over the dock railing and dropped onto the deck, crouching as he landed. Then, in the most dramatic motion Tommy had ever witnessed, he pulled back the hood. Tommy nearly groaned at the sight of his older brother's bright pink hair.

"Oh, for fucks sake! Phil said I was free to go!" Everyone let out a collective breath lowering their weapons, but not putting them away quite yet.

Techno stared at him, clearly unimpressed. “You didn’t think we’d let you go to different lands unsupervised, did you? You’ll cause an international incident. Besides, someone needed to make sure you came home in one piece.”

“Shouldn’t you be busy worrying about some stupid military strategy?” Tommy huffed.

“Bruh, I do more than mil- whatever. I wanted to broaden my horizons, see the world. If Dream gets to, so do I.” Tommy rolled his eyes. “Besides, Puffy’s got it handled until I decide to come back.”

Dream extended an arm to his brother, like the traitor he was. “Well, I’m happy to have another competent wielder and fighter with us. Stars knows we’ll be getting into trouble with the gremlin aboard.”

“Fuck you!”

Both men ignored Tommy in favor of grasping forearms. “Happy to be of service,” Techno offered a feral grin.

“Besides,” Dream shot them all a shit-eating grin. “You know what this means?”

“What?” Purpled asked.

“We have a full-wielding team! We can finally start doing multi matches again!”

“Is that all you think about?” Tommy asked him incredulously, ignoring his brother’s roaring laughter.

The older blonde shrugged. “Basically yeah, that and adventure.”

“Please none of you have been on a real adventure,” Techno scoffed.

Dream glared at the prince. “Of course, we have! I’ve got so many stories! Great and really cool stories about my awesome adventures!”

“Oh, yeah?” Techno smirked. “Tell me one.”

“What right now?” Dream looked around the boat. “Well, there was this one time that I had to do this thing and then I- but we had to- and we found- you know what? Fuck you! I don’t owe you anything!”

“Sounds like a real great adventure,” Techno drawled.

“Ooo, I know a story about a great adventure,” Purpled piped up, smirking.

“Oh yeah, what’s it about?” Foolish asked as he finished tying up the sails.

Techno scoffed, “Yeah I wanna hear this.”

“Well, it’s called the curious tale of a not so lost, runaway prince,” Purpled laughed as he ducked the piece of rock Tommy pelted at him, ignoring the crew roaring behind them.

Eventually, they set off to sea, and things were beginning to settle down. Even Techno fell into an easy rhythm with Tommy’s new family. He and Tommy stood shoulder to shoulder, watching the sunset from the boat’s bow. Although Techno was more focused on his brother than the sea of oranges and pinks reflected in his brother’s blue irises.

It was a difficult thing to grasp, how much Tommy had changed. He’d always been so young, so loud. Now they stood in silence, completely content. Tommy’s eyes find his out of the corner of his eye and his brother grins. For just a second, Techno is staring at his Theseus and then his eye catches on a small scar on his brother’s cheek. It’s small but clearly deep and

only recently healed. This is no longer his Theseus, he reminds himself, it's his Tommy and that may be just as well.

"It doesn't feel like an end," Tommy says so abruptly breaking their silence Techno almost startles.

"Heh?"

Tommy shrugs. "All of this," he waves a hand around the ship, "I thought it would feel like closing a chapter in a book or some shit, but it doesn't."

"What does it feel like?"

"A beginning, a continuation maybe. I don't know, Big T, but it doesn't feel like an end."

~Fin~

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for the love and support, this fic has been such a journey to write and I feel as if I've grown a lot as a writer through this process. i honestly can't believe it's all over now, i don't know what to do with myself lol. you've all been amazing and i hope to see yall around. if you want to hear about what i'm writing next or just want updates on my life in general come follow me on [twitter](#) :)

Works inspired by this one

[Only Love Can Hurt Like This \(BEING RE WRITTEN\)](#) by [MFT_08, orphan_account](#)

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